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OR,

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A STORY OF THE SETTLEMENTS.

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SIMPLE PHIL.

CHAPTER I.

THE HUSKING.

"Now, Phil, if you go up to huskin' to-night, and you must, for I should no more das't come back alone than nothin' in the world, I want you to remember your place. There'll be lots o' folks there—most all the village, purty likely. Now, do you keep back, and set and look on all you've a mind to. I don't care how much you see of the world and what's goin' on in it, if you only jist keep still, and don't let folks know how simple you be. And especially if Esther Morgan's there, and it's most like she will be, don't you go to follerin' her round, and tryin' to spark her up, as I hearn of your doin' once, when I wa'n't with ye. Wal, 'twill l'arn me better'n to let you go off alone ag'in. You mustn't think of gittin' married, Phil, nor nothin' of that kind. You know you ain't as others of your age—you didn't leave the cradle till you was twenty-one."

"Nor I haven't left the apron-strings yet!"

The brief response was given in a low, meek tone of voice, and without the speaker raising his eyes.

"What is that, Phil? Haven't I often told you that little boys should be seen and not heard? You appear well enough—thanks to the care I've took on ye; so if ye don't say any thing, a person wouldn't mind that you was short-witted. But lately, it seems, you have taken a notion to talk right out what comes into your mind, and that must be put a stop to. Now, don't let me have to speak to you afore that whole company, to-night; it would make me feel the wa'st way, and no mistake. And, above all, I tell you to keep away from Esther. What in the world do you suppose she thinks, with you a hangin' round arter her, when there's plenty of boys she could hev', what's smart by nater'? I ask what could you do with

a wife? You've no more idee of supportin' one than a boy three year old. I've allus had to beg your livin', and people giv' me, acause they knowed it was such a task to take keer of an underwitted person. Now you're jist gittin' so you pay yer way, partly, and I want ye to consider who's took keer of ye so long, and made what little there is of ye. Now, Phil, for once do, pray sakes, mind what I say to ye. Keep yer mouth closed, and if anybody asks ye questions, answer 'em as the good book says—'yea, yea; nay, nay.' Now I want you should remember what I told you, and see how well you can behave. It has grieved me awfully, along back, to see how self-consated you was gittin'—how little you cared for my words."

This peculiar speech had been delivered by a somewhat elderly lady, who sat in a rude arm-chair, swaying back and forth, by way of emphasis to her words, and knitting vigorously, meantime. She was not one of those pleasant, genial-featured old ladies, whose face is a certain index to a kind and affectionate soul. She might, rather, from the restless wanderings of her eye, and the sharp cut of her features, be considered one of those whose chief delight, while upon this mundane sphere, is to repeat the wrongs they have endured, and find fault, not with themselves, but with all the world besides.

Such, indeed, was old Aunt Sally Wimbles, as she was known far and near. Her small, bustling frame, sharp voice, and vinegary disposition speedily became familiar to all in whose vicinity she chanced to live. Fifty years she had dwelt upon the earth, and, singular to relate, during all that time, she had made very few friends, perhaps *not one* decided enemy. People could convict her of no particular vices; they rather pitied her forlorn situation, and generally bestowed charity upon her when it was asked. But they were not sorry when she took her departure, and very cordial invitations to visit that section again she never received.

The person addressed was a youth of medium size and ordinary appearance. Still, it may be questionable as to the degree of propriety with which the term "youth" could be applied to him. Though not betraying he same in his general appearance, he had seen more than thirty years of life. All

those years had been passed in a sort of aggravated leading-strings. The opportunities which Phil Wimbles, or Simple Phil, as he was generally designated, had enjoyed for becoming a man, in the more essential qualities, had been very limited, indeed.

His father had died when scarcely two years had passed over Phil's head, and his mother soon after followed him to that dark and silent sphere—the grave. He was thus left to the care of Aunt Sally, then young and scheming. She at once conceived a plan for making the prattler “pay his own way.” Instead of being placed at school, the boy was banished to a corner, where he was kept during the long summer days, deprived of pure air and healthy exercise. If outraged nature called loudly for a change, and sickness visited the puny frame, not nature's own remedies were called in, but villainous drugs and unsavory decoctions of herbs were poured down the uncomplaining throat.

And so life passed till Phil was twenty years old. At that time Sally, who had retained single blessedness thus far upon her earthly journey, had saved enough from the various charities which had been bestowed upon her, to purchase a home in the Western settlements. Accordingly, she left her haunts in the East, and did not halt till they reached the embryo village of Pineville. Here a wealthy man, Squire Hutchins, had bought a large tract of land from government, and proceeded to lay it out in farms to suit purchasers. One or two of these had been sold already, and upon another Aunt Sally and Phil located, the squire kindly assisting to build them a house.

Here they had lived for ten years, while Pineville had gradually grown up around them, till it was quite a thriving village. Phil still maintained his former *status*, but as years soured Aunt Sally's disposition, and necessarily brought more of the world before his notice, he began to realize that he was either what had been represented of him—a fool—or that full justice was not being done him. Which the case might be, he wished to ascertain.

As night drew near, Aunt Sally was in a bustle of preparation. A husking was “coming off” at the squire's, and upon all such occasions, she made it an invariable rule to be present

The evening promised to be all that could be desired. Sufficiently cool to render moderate exercise a pleasure, it was calm and pleasant. Not a cloud marked the sky, and the full harvest moon looked down with all its silvery wealth upon the broad, rolling regions of the Western prairies.

No sooner had evening shades begun to prevail than Sally bustled forth, followed at a respectful distance by Phil, who carried an antiquated chair for the use of his faithful guardian. The latter busied herself by repeating the same sage counsels which had rung in the youth's ears since day-break, and every word of which had assumed a stereotyped form. The half-mile they had to travel not proving sufficient to free the good lady's mind fully, she drew Phil aside before entering the company, and held him by the button for full five minutes, while she recounted charge after charge for his guidance through the evening.

Following the customs of his Eastern ancestors, Squire Hutchins had built a capacious barn, in which to stow the productions of his farm. Early as it was, the huge threshing-floor was well lighted by a dozen lanterns, and the wide doors thrown open to all who chose to make up the husking-party. Of course it was generally understood that the husking was but a part of the attraction. A spacious room in the squire's house had been designated as "the hall," and there, upon more than one occasion, the youth of the neighborhood had met for the oft-condemned but very agreeable "tripping of the light fantastic toe." Indeed, it was rather customary, after any social gathering, to adjourn to "the hall," and spend an hour or two in that invigorating exercise.

The squire, with such of his family as were not required in the house, and one or two neighbors, had assembled before the arrival of Aunt Sally. Stationing her nephew near the entrance, she advanced to the host with her blindest smile.

"Wal, good-night, squire," she begun. "You see, I thought I'd come over airly, 'cause it sorter blinds my eyes to be out in the dark. I hed tew bring Phil along, so't if I went hum alone I should hev' somebody to keep me in the road. You can put him back in one corner; Phil is real good to husk, and he won't trouble anybody much. He's simple, Phil is; but he don't never dew any hurt."

"Never mind Phil, Aunt Sally," returned the host, a pleasant-featured man of near sixty. "I only wish we had more such steady, quiet young men."

"I've allus tried to dew wal by Phil," pursued the jealous aunt. "It's been a hard task, and no mistake, to bring up such a child. But the folks hev' been kind tew me, and so I hev' come through it. Now he begins to pick up, slowly, and is a good deal of help to me."

Other neighbors having now arrived, Aunt Sally turned to her charge again.

"Now, Phil," she said, placing a seat for him, "do you set right down here in this corner, and be a-huskin'. May be, if you work pretty well, the squire will help us a little, and Lord knows we shall need it afore next summer."

The young man obeyed, very meekly, as was his want. Having seen him well employed Aunt Sally stole away to meet some of the neighbors, who had just entered.

Her usual string of complainings was gone over with, very nearly in a stereotyped dress, and then she turned to where Phil was stationed. She must satisfy herself that he was doing every thing in a proper manner.

To her surprise the seat was vacant—no Phil to be seen. Two ears had been husked, and lay side by side. Fretting and anxious, yet without broaching the subject, she waited some minutes for his reëpearance. But no Phil came, and soon her mind was harassed beyond all restraint.

"Who's seen that boy?" she demanded, striking an attitude in the midst of the floor. "I set him in that corner, huskin', and now he's gone, somewhere. If he was like the rest of you I shouldn't mind it; but I always have had to look out for him. I don't know but I always shall."

To accommodate the anxious spinster, something of a search was instituted, but failed of producing any results. Wherever the truant might be, it was certain that he was not in that vicinity.

Fifteen or twenty minutes after the disappearance of Phil, two persons might have been seen approaching the barn from a direction opposite to the dwelling of Aunt Sally. One of these was a female, young in years and evidently beautiful, so far as the moon-light revealed her form and features,

the other bore a striking resemblance to the missing Phil.

They were walking along quite leisurely, and conversing earnestly. The maiden seemed anxious, almost fearful, casting quick glances around at every rustling leaf or bough. The other seemed striving to quiet her fears.

"I never knew Austin to stay so before," she said, earnestly. "He spoke of the husking to-night, and said he would be here in time for that, game or no game. He is frequently at home before noon, and here it is night, and nothing of him yet. I am afraid some accident has befallen him."

"Don't you think us men had better go out and look for him, pretty soon?" Phil asked. "Possibly Austin's had bad luck—hurt hisself, or suthin'. We kin take part of the squire's lanterns, and find him in a hurry."

"We will wait awhile," said the maiden. "Perhaps he may come in, and it would be too bad to raise an alarm for nothing. But it's very kind of you to suggest it, Phil; I had not thought of that."

"I knowed he's your brother, Esther," was the somewhat awkward reply, "and I—well—what interested you orter be of interest to me, that's all!"

"Yes, that is very true," replied Esther, feeling that she ought to say something, and not knowing what to say.

"I am afraid Austin has undertaken too much, to-day," she added, after a short silence. "You know he is ambitious to be called the best hunter in Pineville. Perhaps he is desirous of making an extra display to-night, on account of the husking, and so gets belated."

"Like as not that's it," returned Phil, with sudden hope. "Any way, Austin is a darned good hand with a rifle. I wish I could dew as well. But then, he's allers had the run of the woods, and I hain't—only when I run away and went with him."

Phil Wimbles paused, though it cost him an effort to keep back the thoughts which he would have spoken. In a moment more they reached the barn.

Many a sly wink and nod ran round the company as Phil and Esther entered. A goodly number had already assembled, and not one but enjoyed the evident confusion of Aunt

Sally at this unexpected return of her missing *protégé*. The latter paid little attention to those present. He conducted Esther to a comfortable seat, and was upon the point of taking one beside her. At this juncture Aunt Sally, having found her tongue, sprung to his side.

"Here, Phil," she said, pushing him away toward an obscure corner, "I thought you was goin' to husk, so't we could git this corn off early, and go home! Why didn't you stay to your work? Now put in and make up what time you've lost. Great heed you pay to what I told you just before we got here!"

The youth meekly took the seat indicated, and when satisfied that he intended no further rebellion, Aunt Sally turned to Esther.

"You must git rid of him!" she said, in an impressive whisper. "Don't be at all bashful about it. Phil knows he ain't very bright, and all you'll have to do is jest speak up. I got rid of many a young spark so in my day, and arter I'd once told 'em they allus liked me enough better fer it."

"I assure you, Aunt Sally, I rather like Phil's company. He is pleasant and sociable. Besides, Austin thinks a great deal of Phil, so I esteem him for my brother's sake."

"But you shouldn't encourage him, Esther. He'll git in a notion of likin' the woming folks' company, and fust I shall know he'll be gettin' married; I can't spare him in my old age; I've allus tuk keer of him, and now it's but fair that he should see to me."

"That's the very reason he ought to get married, Aunt Sally. Then he would have a home, and you would have some one to assist you. You would not need to work so hard in your old age."

"Ah, well; I aint so old as folks think I be," she said, glancing at Squire Hutchins, who was standing near, and who was a widower; "it's more care of that boy that's put these wrinkles onto my face."

"Then I am sure you hadn't ought to be troubled with him any longer," said the merry Esther, while Aunt Sally turned away in disgust.

The husking frolic was soon at its height. Youths and maidens, husbands and wives, old and young were there

Pineville had given itself up to jollity for the present evening, and from the broad granaries and barns of Squire Hutchins, flowed a stream of mirth and joviality. Piles of golden ears swelled rapidly, and the waiting wagon made numerous trips to the fast-filling granaries.

CHAPTER II.

AN INTERRUPTION.

IN such circles as that assembled at Squire Hutchins', upon the present occasion, there is not much care taken to keep a sharp look-out for danger. And, in this especial case, why should there be? They, poor innocents, all unsuspecting as they were, knew not the terrible fate hanging over them—suspicioned not that death, with remorseless strides, was hastening that way, and not for a single victim!

Esther Morgan had endeavored to drown anxiety for the continued absence of her brother, and had supposed all possible and impossible reasons for his delay; but now she could stifle her emotions no longer, and rose to her feet with the intention of consulting Squire Hutchins in regard to the expediency of instituting a search for him.

As she did so a gleam of light from one of the houses, at a little distance, broke upon her notice. She paused, and upon looking more closely was satisfied that all was not right.

"Mr. Bailey, your house is on fire!" she exclaimed, without really feeling sure whether such was the case or not.

In an instant all was commotion. The men started with a rush for the burning building, while the women uttered loud cries of surprise and terror.

But the men who had started thus hastily for the scene of conflagration recoiled as rapidly. Up from the gloom of fence and bush rose swarthy, painted savages, who, with shots, shouts, and yells, rushed toward the barn!

Instantly the party plunged toward the other door, but

here they were met by another force, and fresh shots fired into their midst. Three or four had fallen, and the balance were uncertain what to do. In that dilemma they did nothing, till the Indians burst upon them with brand, rifle, tomahawk, and knife!

Of course the settlers, surprised, unarmed, helpless, were as grass before the mower's scythe. Those who attempted to flee were pursued, shot or knocked down; those who remained were either seized for captives or shared the more cruel fate of their fleeing brethren.

In a few moments the carnival was ended, the torch applied to the contents of the barn, and the Indians had gone their way, to burn and plunder the balance of Pineville. Of the merry party gathered in the barn a few minutes previous, what now remained?

A few mangled, ghastly corpses—more men and women stunned and wounded, a few prisoners, and several fugitives, skulking about the fields or seeking the adjacent forest! How instantly, how terribly had the scene changed from happiness to dismay—from life and joviality to death and mourning!

But, there was one who was neither dead, wounded, prisoner, or fugitive. When assured that the Indians had really left the vicinity, and that it would speedily become too warm for comfort in his present quarters, Phil Wimbles protruded his head from beneath a bundle of corn, and, darting through the gantlet of fire, dashed into the fields with the speed of a deer.

At the first alarm of fire, he had hastened to extricate himself, but had not succeeded before the first band of Indians delivered their fire. Seized with a panic, he started toward the opposite door, and narrowly escaped being shot down. While the others stood dismayed, he, under the influence of an uncontrollable impulse, crawled beneath the nearest pile of corn. Here he had remained during the massacre which followed, his blood frozen at the terrible scene; and yet he was helpless to resist—unable to flee. He had expected every moment to be dragged forth and added to the pile of butchered ones; but, luckily for him, the Indians had no suspicion of his hiding-place, and departed without disturbing him.

The first woodland which he saw, and which was, indeed,

the nearest, lay beyond a large field of stubble, from a portion of which the corn had not yet been removed. Leaping a fence, which movement attracted the notice of an Indian, Phil sprung toward the forest at the top of his speed.

The savage had a gun, but it was empty. He had nothing on hand, and with a wild whoop he bounded in pursuit of the fleeing white. The latter heard the shout, and realized that his life depended upon the good use made of his legs. That was certainly incentive enough; for the man who will not run for life would be very apt to fail in any other race.

Away they went, over the uneven ground, Phil stumbling, puffing and sweating, but making good time; the Indian taking to the race more naturally, but gaining very little ground.

Such a race could not last. The woods were not far away; neither could Phil maintain his present rate of speed for any great length of time. It was merely a question of distance to the wood.

Just as he came to that portion of the field where the shocks of corn were standing, Phil felt a keen pain darting through his left side. This was a certain warning that he was exerting himself too severely, and he knew that unless the warning was immediately heeded, he would soon be unable to move at any thing more than a walk. He began to reflect. Probably the Indian had no other arms than a hatchet and knife. Phil recollected that he had a large clasp-knife in his pocket—one which he had that day sharpened. His mind was made up in a moment. He would try a brush with his pursuer, and the best man should come off conqueror!

Managing to strike against a shock of corn, sideways, he stopped his momentum, and dropped behind it. Slipping out and opening the knife, he assumed a crouching posture, best adapted, as he judged, to give him the advantage in the expected encounter. Then, with a heart beating fast, he awaited the result.

The Indian was beginning to increase his speed. He saw, plainly, that it would require his utmost efforts to overtake the white before reaching the wood, after which the question was problematic if he should find him at all. He noticed the manner in which Phil stumbled against the pile of corn, but

attributed it to unsteadiness and exhaustion. Hoping to overtake him, he pressed on with the greatest speed.

The result was what Phil had not anticipated, or even dared hope for. The Indian dashed by, looking straight ahead for his no longer visible victim. Away, nearly to the forest, went the savage; then he suspicioned the game which had been played with him, and turned upon his heel, looking in every direction for the slippery youth.

Phil had learned a lesson from his former experience, and no sooner had the savage passed beyond ear-shot than he crept cautiously away several yards, and proceeded to wedge himself into another shock. This was no easy task, especially as he was very careful not to leave foot-prints. But he succeeded at length, and placing himself in a position to spring upon any chance assailant, with the knife still clutched in his hand, he composed himself to wait.

He did wait, till waiting became not only quite tedious, but very painful. The Indians had plundered and burned portions of the late smiling village, and were now engaged in searching for fugitives. This Phil had been able to gather from what he could see and hear. Added to the pain of his cramped position, the prowlings of the savage horde suggested to him that he might more safely remove to the forest.

He had never been a philosopher. With him to think was to act. If his thoughts were for the best, his move was fortunate, if otherwise the result corresponded. Carefully he crawled forth, and standing up beside the shock looked around till satisfied that no Indians had yet gained the cornfield. Then he walked silently and rapidly away, clasping the open knife in his strong right hand.

Phil gained the wood and walked for some distance before daring to pause. It was quite open, affording very little opportunity for concealment, and the bright moonlight rendered objects painfully distinct. Finally his cramped and aching limbs demanded a respite, and he threw himself upon the trunk of a fallen tree.

He had sat thus but a short time when he heard a yell of despair, a whoop of triumph and the report of a gun! It was not far distant, and he doubted not some one of his friends had fallen. A vague terror again took possession of his soul.

"These woods are too open," he mused. "I shall be hunted out, and then it will be too late to flee. I must seek the main woods, or this child is a gone 'coon, that's sure! I should like to know where Esther is, and Aunt Sally. I wish I could do any thing for 'em. I'd go back there and try it—that's true—if I did git killed."

No person would have doubted the courage of Phil after hearing the last remark. There was no earthly ear to hear it; no vain boasting prompted the words. He cast one longing glance back toward the blazing settlement, as though he would read there the confirmation of his hopes or fears, then turned and plunged into the forest.

The belt of timber in which he had taken refuge was completely isolated, being surrounded upon all sides by clearings, of greater or less extent. Thus, though of considerable extent in itself, it was no secure refuge should the Indians choose to scour its depths in search of fugitives.

Reaching its margin, he passed over to the main forest, crawling upon the ground as he went by the most exposed places. There was a building at no great distance, but he knew the inmates to have been at the husking-party, and there were no signs of Indians. He was distant from it some hundred yards, when a commotion reached his ears. On looking up, he saw three figures emerging from the cabin, which he at first took for white men, as they were dressed in the clothing of the settlers. But the fiendish yell which saluted his ears a moment later convinced him of the mistake.

Of course another race for life followed at once. Phil had been too successful thus far in escaping the savage destroyers to relax his efforts without just cause. They did not institute an immediate pursuit, as their guns were loaded, and one after another fired after the fleeing white before they thought of attempting to overhaul him. As all their bullets went wide, they started with a fresh howl, while Phil rapidly lessened the distance between himself and the forest.

He was quite half-way to the friendly shades before the Indians started; but they were reckless, and hastened after him with tumultuous howls. For an instant they paused on seeing him enter the dark shadow, but presently resumed the pursuit, howling and shouting as they came.

Phil was safe—so he felt—and in the edge of the woods he paused to notice more closely than he had yet done, the movements and appearance of the pursuers. They appeared grotesque and fearful enough, their wild, outlandish figures dressed in the garments which they had found in the settlers' cabins. But they were coming on rapidly, and it was necessary that he should seek for some secure refuge.

He had turned to continue his flight, when a rifle-crack rung out upon the night air, so close beside him that he sprung into the branches of a small sapling and gazed around with mute astonishment. At first he had supposed the shot aimed at himself, but the wild yell which broke from the savages, followed by the fall of one of them, gave evidence that a friend was near him.

The Indians paused for a moment, but seeming to consider that they had only a single foeman to combat, the two remaining rushed on toward the forest. Before they had taken a dozen steps came another report, and a second bullet sped on its errand. This missed its mark, but the effect was not lost. Uncertain what they might encounter, the savages wheeled about, raised their fallen companion, and sped from the spot as fast as possible.

Thus far, Phil had been too utterly surprised to think of action; but now he resolved to seek those friends who had done him such good service. He, therefore, crept cautiously in that direction, fearing lest he should provoke a shot from the unseen marksman.

"Come on; what are ye afeard of?" sung out a cheery voice, which he recognized at once.

"Wal, wal. If that ain't *you*, Austin Morgan! Who'd a-thought it? Whar' in the world *did* ye come from? Whar' ye been? What made ye so late?"

"There, there, Phil; hold on. You're askin' more questions than I can keep run of. I was just foolish enough to git nabbed by the Injins, and have only just got away from them. But say, Phil, how are things at the village?"

"Bad enough, I'll warrant," returned Phil.

And he proceeded to relate what he knew of the state of affairs, dwelling somewhat upon his own adventures, which seemed to him the light of peril and heroism.

"But how came ye to git took?" he pursued, having wound up his own narrative. "Esther was dreffully off on your account, and I told her I'd come out and look for ye. It seemed a great disappointment to her that ye didn't come back; I'se a talkin' with her as we went over to the huskin'."

"It was by very natural causes that I got into such a scrape," returned Austin Morgan. "I had shot a deer, as I intended to do, and was busy cutting out such parts as I could bring. The varmints slipped up behind me, and fust I knowed they had me foul. But I paid 'em off well in the end."

"Ye see they left me with a couple o' the scamps, back here a bit, while they come on to murder and destroy. Well, they what had me bunked down, or one on 'em did, and went to sleep. T'other sot watchin' me, and I sot watchin' him. Purty soon the fire had got burnt down, and he went to put it up a bit; I watched a good chance, and pushed him into it. You won't believe me, Phil, but he dropped his gun into the fire, and it went off, killin' the one what was asleep. I never once thought of any such thing till it was done. After that I felt like gittin' away. The one that was left jumped for the other gun, and I after him with this. I expected he would get the one he's arter, and he did. But afore he could cock it I took him a blow square with the butt of my gun, and I guess he never cared much how the fight ended, arter that!"

"So you killed them both?" said Phil, with mouth wide open at the story.

"Yes—no. I was the cause of their dying, but I couldn't be said to kill the fust one. However, we won't argue about that. I took both of their guns, and all their accoutrements. It is lucky I did. 'Twill give you and me both an outfit. Some of 'em went off with my rifle, but I have one nearly as good."

"So you fired those two guns at those Injins?"

"Jes' so."

"That's what made me think there was two of you"

Austin Morgan now produced one of the confiscated weapons, and proceeded to reload it very carefully. When this was accomplished he passed it to Phil with the powder-horn, bullet-pouch, and a spare flint.

"That is your gun," he said. "Be very careful of it, for we may want to use them at any moment. It's well loaded, so ye needn't be afraid if ye take good aim, but what 'twili bring any thing that powder and ball can fetch."

Phil took the piece, and after adjusting horn and pouch surveyed it very carefully, by the moonlight. The possession of a good gun, well loaded, added greatly to his stock of courage. He even felt that a painted Indian was not so dreadful a being, if one could meet him with such a weapon.

His companion proceeded to reload the other weapon in an equally careful manner, and when this was done he dropped the breech upon the ground with an air of relief.

"Fortin' seems to hev' throw'd us together," he said, "and I think we'd do better to keep together, especially as we've both got a gun. Don't you?"

"Sartin I dew, Austin."

"Then I've got an idea! We must see what's become of our best friends!"

"How—how'll we do it?" asked Phil, who quite naturally shrunk from returning to the dangerous vicinity, even with a friend and two guns.

"That I do not know," returned Austin. "But it must be done. My sister is thar', and your aunt is thar', and—well, there's others thar'. We must find out what the prospect is. Hope you ain't afraid. You'll be safer with me than you would fightin' an Injin with a jack-knife!"

"No, I ain't *afeard*," returned Phil, slowly. "I was thinkin' likely 'nuff you could go up alone and dew better'n ve could to hev' me with ye."

"Pshaw! We won't run inter any nest of 'em, but if they've got Esther, or—or—anybody else, we want tew know it. I dew, anyway!"

"And so dew I!"

"Then come on."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THEY FOUND

As it was possible they might meet bodies of Indians in the smaller woodland, it was deemed advisable to bear off more to the left. This course would give them a tract of newly cleared territory to traverse, where the stumps could be made advantageous in case of peril, and where it was hardly probable the savages would be encountered.

Phil followed in the footsteps of his bolder and more practiced companion, with a fearful heart. The scenes he had lately witnessed were sufficient to have unsettled a firmer and better developed fortitude than he possessed. He looked behind each log and stump with the expectation of beholding a bleeding form, either of friend or foe. The rustle of every leaf seemed to him like the moving of a hidden enemy. But, finally, his brain cooled down as they proceeded steadily along, and no hideous sights met his gaze. By the time they reached the last swell of ground, and were enabled to look upon the doomed settlement, he was quite as calm as his companion.

The sight which met their vision was not one to steady their nerves, or quiet their fears in regard to those whose safety was dear to them. One or two dwellings still burned brightly; others had fallen in, and were now but smoldering heaps. The great barn, which had witnessed their merry gathering a few hours before, was a broad sheet of flame, throwing its glare far and wide over the dark fields. In various places dwellings stood dark and gloomy, untouched with the destroying brand. But, fully half of the village, all the finest and most valuable buildings, had burned down or were still in flames.

Only in one respect were they disappointed. Not an Indian was to be seen. In places they fancied prostrate forms lay upon the ground, but nothing was there to indicate life. The buildings were allowed to burn away, and no hand was

raised to save them. Phil and his friend exchanged glances, but for some moments neither of them spoke.

"The Injins are gone," said Austin, abruptly.

"How do you know that?" demanded Phil. "May be they have hid, just for our benefit."

"No, they don't do business in that way," returned Austin, decidedly. "What would they hide for? They have every thing their own way, and if they was here they'd make their presence known. 'Tain't nateral for Injins to keep very still arter sech a night as they've just had. My word for it, they've gone. I'm goin' up and see what good we can do before it is too late."

Phil seemed to hesitate for a moment, and then swallowing his heart with a great "gulp," he followed the lead of his bold comrade.

Austin Morgan was a tall, well-developed young man, possessing great strength, and courage to match. The forest was his elysium, and he was never better satisfied than when, rifle in hand, he was wandering far from the haunt of his fellows, in pursuit of game. Hence it was that the opportunities he might have enjoyed for obtaining an education were neglected, and the stalwart young man had grown up a fine hunter and frontiersman, but a very poor scholar. Indeed, in the latter respect, Phil was his superior, he having seized every opportunity which presented for learning to read and write.

The route they pursued was somewhat circuitous, and they advanced with considerable caution, notwithstanding the confident assertion of Austin that the savages had gone.

They had nearly reached the village outskirts when they came upon the form of a man, lying in the road. His eyes appeared closed, and they would have passed on, supposing him to be dead; but, just as they were moving away, he spoke, faintly.

"Can't you help a poor man?"

They hastened to him again, and found that his leg had been broken by a musket shot from one of the savages. He had bound it up as well as his scanty means would permit, but was so weakened from loss of blood and exposure to the chilly night air as to be utterly helpless. He expressed his

belief that the Indians had really gone, but was unable to say when or in which direction their departure had been taken.

The two men raised and bore him to the nearest building, where he was made as comfortable as possible, and then they hastened away to seek other sufferers and gain further intelligence.

They had gone but a short distance before encountering a man, who walked slowly and with much apparent effort. He reeled at every step, and at times seemed upon the point of losing his balance. They hastened up to him, and found the sufferer to be none other than Squire Hutchins.

"Is it possible we find *you* in this state, squire?" asked Phil, who was slightly in advance. "How are you hurt?"

"Not severely, my young friend," was the earnest answer. "An Indian merely struck me upon the head with his gun, and I have but just regained consciousness. Fortunately my injuries are slight, and I can assist in giving comfort to the other sufferers."

"The Injins are gone, I take it," said Austin, who had been looking in vain for any signs of the common foe. "I see nothin' of 'em."

"I think they have left us," returned the squire, "though I can not speak positively. I have seen none of them since getting a fair knowledge of what was passing about me. But do you hurry on and see whom you can assist, while I take care of myself, and as much more as may be."

The searchers passed on, and found several others who were more or less injured, and one or two who were dead. But none of those they encountered could give them any information in regard to the persons they were especially searching for. In that awful time of peril no one seemed to have thought of or regarded the fate of another.

At length they paused upon the outskirts of the settlement. No intelligence yet of Aunt Sally, Esther Morgan or Melinda Sawyer, a maiden of whom report spoke very frequently in connection with Austin Morgan. The dwelling of the Sawyers had been burned down, but the houses of Phil and Austin still remained.

"I guess it must be that our folks have gone home," said the latter, not as though he really believed what he was

saying. "Most likely they have, and Melinda's gone over with Esther. Come on, over to my house, and then we'll go to yours."

A quick walk of a few minutes brought them to the dwelling of Austin. All was dark and gloomy. Their fears begun to weigh down oppressively as they noticed the look of utter desolation and loneliness. Austin grasped the door-handle; but his heart failed, and releasing his hold, he knocked loudly upon the heavy wood. The echo was hollow and ghostly. Twice he repeated the summons, but there was no response. Then he called aloud:

"Come and open the door! It is me—Austin; the Injins are all gone. Let me in."

But no movement answered the verbal appeal. Opening the door he passed in, followed by Phil. They soon produced a light, and proceeded to search the house from cellar to gable.

They were relieved at finding no dead bodies, and quite as much mystified in regard to the strange disappearance of their friends.

"You don't think the Injins can hev' tuk off a hull drove o' prisoners?" asked Austin, as they ended the unsatisfactory search.

"I don't know," returned Phil. "It's certain of one thing; they *hain't* tuk 'em off, we shall never see any thing more of 'em, 'less it may be their bones!"

"No, hush; don't say so!" pleaded Austin. "We'll go over to your house and look for 'em. Suthin' may turn up there, or Aunt Sally may know more than the rest of 'em. We won't give it up yet."

"I don't think you'll find any Aunt Sally there," pursued the skeptical youth. "Wherever the rest's gone, she's gone—whether it's in this world or some other, I'm sartaip I don't know!"

They walked rapidly, almost running, so great was their anxiety to clear up the mystery which enshrouded the fate of their friends. They had no longer any fears from the Indians; indeed they scarcely thought of them at all.

On nearing the house, the hope which they had not been able to banish, sunk again. All was dark and gloomy. Phil was too excited to pause. He burst open the door, calling loudly

upon the name of his aunt. All was silent—not even an echo mocking him. He rushed to the bed, and placed both hands upon it, only to meet emptiness.

“It’s no use, Austin. She’s gone, as I said. They’re all gone! What shall we do?”

“Let us strike a light, and make sure that they are not here—that nobody is here.”

Although protesting that they could gain nothing by the delay, Phil complied, and they soon explored the upper portion of the house.

“Now for the cellar,” said Austin, “and then we’ll leave.”

“It’s no use lookin’ down thar’,” urged Phil. “Nobody’d git into a cellar to hide, especially arter they’d been called as much as we’ve called ’em.”

But Austin pushed ahead, and a moment later his voice was heard in sharp altercation. His companion pressed forward, and for a moment the sense of the ridiculous was almost too much for Phil’s nerves.

The doorway from the kitchen opened upon a platform some four or five feet square, from which the stairs to the cellar descended. Upon the platform was a rough bench containing various pots and kettles—Aunt Sally’s stock of culinary utensils. Crouching behind this was the form of a man cowering before the stern gaze and half-lifted rifle of Austin Morgan.

“What are ye doin’ here?” the latter demanded, with a threatening demonstration. “Tell me, right off.”

“Well, I wa’n’t doin’ nothin’,” was the sullen answer, “only keepin’ away from the Injins!”

“A brave one you are!” hissed Austin. “Squatted behind a pile o’ pots and kittles, and not an Injin nowheres nigh! Thar’s plenty of better work for you to be a-doin’. Why don’t you go and help ’tend to the wounded?”

“Why don’t ye go yerselves?” was the insolent rejoinder. “Your heads ain’t no better’n mine, as I know of.”

Austin bit down his wrath, and condescended to inform the coward of their purposes. The latter listened with a mocking smile, and when the story was ended he said:

“You may as well go back, and not look for ’em any more

You never'll find 'em, for the Injins hev' tuk 'em all off with 'em--Aunt Sal, Esther, Melind, an' all!"

"How do you know this?" demanded Austin and his companion, in a breath.

"Know it because I seen it; and that's the best way to know any thing."

"I don't believe you've seen an Injin to-night, Sam Button. You are lying to us about this!"

"No, I ain't, Aus.; I'm in earnest. I was hid right over in the edge of the squire's hog-pastur', among them pine stumps. I seen the Injins when they'se gittin' ready to go home, and they hed all them what you're a-lookin' for, and some others, tied up; so, o' course, they tuk 'em with 'em."

"How came you here, if you were hiding in the hog-pastur'?"

"Easiest way in the world. The Injins begun to scour about, and I reckoned like enuff they'd want some fresh pork afore they sot out. I didn't think I'se quite fat enuff, so I slipped off this way, and crawled inter the cellar-winder. Then I came up here, and thought I'd git out when I heerd you, and reckon'd 'twar some shake o' the Injins!"

A curl of contempt wreathed the features of the reckless Austin; but it quickly passed away, and he continued:

"Which way did the Injins go?"

"I don't know," returned Button, who was a dissolute, unprincipled vagrant. "I didn't take particular pains to watch 'em, myself. I'se quite satisfied if they went off and left me alone!"

"Then that is all you know about 'em?"

"I reckon so; and it's more than I cared any thing about knowin'."

"Then go up and help about the wounded, while we try to find out more."

"Maybe I will, and maybe not. Sam Button ain't one to be ordered around by every jackanapes that takes a notion to dew it! I'm very comfortable in here."

Austin, who had done all the talking, was not one to waste further words with the insolent scoundrel, nor did he chose to submit to his foul insults. Passing the candle and his rifle into Phil's hands, he grasped the offender by the collar, drew

him from his place of refuge, along the floor of the adjoining room, and pushed him from the open door.

"You hain't hearn the last o' this!" hissed the exasperated ruffian. "I may meet you alone, sometime, Aus. Morgan! If do, there will be an old account to settle up!"

"I shall be very much afraid of it, arter the specymen of your valyor what we've had to-night. If you want to prove which of us is the best man, get your rifle, and see which of us will do the most to try to git our friends back again. *That* will settle the matter."

"I ain't big enuff fool to try any sich thing," was the retort, "nor you needn't make anybody think you be. It's only a plan to shirk off, and leave the rest of us to bury them what's knocked over!"

"I'm goin', with God's help, to make an effort to git back some of those that have been carried off," returned Austin, solemnly. "If I live, and it's a possible thing, I'll bring back some of them."

"The greater fool you!" growled the other, as he turned and walked sullenly from the spot.

The two friends then extinguished the light, closed and fastened the door, and took their way back toward the smoldering ruins.

They found nothing here to satisfy their anxiety, and after taking a supply of food, they set forth to scour the forest. It could not be far from morning, and in the light of day they hoped to overtake the Indians; what they would do further remained to be proven.

They had not traveled far when a moan of pain sounded upon their ears from behind a large tree. They paused at the sound, and in a moment more a staggering form appeared. They could see that the stranger was hatless, and wounded in the head. Large quantities of blood had flowed down over his face and neck and clothes, making his appearance truly horrible.

"Will you not help me reach home?" he asked, extending his arms toward them in helpless supplication. "I am wounded in the side, but that wasn't enough. When the red-men came to go away, they found me near their path, and gave me this blow upon the head. May God forgive them!"

"So it is you, Parson Willard?" said Austin, on recognizing the resident divine—a man of large sympathies and extended Christian heart. "Then the blamed critters couldn't even spare you. Certainly we will assist you back to the village, although we are quite anxious to learn whether Esther, Aunt Sally and some others were taken off prisoners. If so, we propose to go arter 'em."

"If missing, they were taken off, without doubt. But will it not be suicidal for you to attempt pursuit? So it seems to me?"

"Most likely it's dangerous; but we've made up our minds to go, and I don't think it's best to back down till we've tried it."

"I admire your spirit," said the sufferer, "and will pray God to help you in the undertaking. His assistance will be of more service to you than all other."

They conducted him back to his own dwelling, which had very fortunately escaped the general conflagration. Finding some one to dress his wounds and afford such relief as was possible, the two devoted young men again set forth in pursuit of their favorite object.

CHAPTER IV.

FINDING INDIANS.

"Now we are ready again," said Austin, as the twain stepped into the deep shades of the forest. "My conscience, how dark these woods are gittin'! Oh, I see now; it is the moon gittin' down. In that case, the sun'll be up in an hour or so."

In fact a few steps into the woodland brought them into the most profound darkness. The moon had sunk so low that its light no longer penetrated the forest. The adventurers could scarcely see their hands before them.

"Reckon'twill be lighter'n this purty soon," said Phil, after coming in forcible collision with a giant tree. "We can't dew

any thing tryin' to poke along this way; let's stop and rest till its lighter."

"You are right, Phil; we may just as well wait as to blunder on at this rate. Find a good place, where we can sit down and talk over affairs."

The person addressed was not long in complying, and seated upon a grassy knoll, beneath sighing pines, the two young men sat and conversed, each more fully than he had ever done before, of the prospects, hopes, and wishes of his future life. Well they realized that both of them might not again return to the homes they had just quitted, perhaps neither of them. There is something in the influence of such a moment which draws hearts together as by a magnetic influence. Austin and Phil had always been friends, but never had they felt that entire confidence in each other which was henceforth to mark their intercourse.

The time thus consumed had been but brief, yet it begun to seem that morning light would never come. While they were thus idling away the time what might be happening to those they loved? True, neither of them had any idea how they should proceed, or what was to be the end of their almost aimless mission. Only they were quite impatient to be away.

"Darn it all!" muttered Phil, rising to his feet and peering, first upward, then toward the east, "wonder if daylight never is goin' to come along. Every thing works right square intew the red-skins' hands, blast me if it don't!"

"Sit down, Phil," said Austin, giving his coat an impatient pull. "You must be more careful, or we shall git into trouble."

"Oh, I'll dew that afore we git to the Injins," returned the one addressed. "Never be afeard of me, I'm all right on such matters."

"But now is the time to begin," urged Austin, "and git a habit formed o' bein' quiet and easy. Then you won't be tuk off'n yer guard, and make bad work of some good job."

Phil sat in silence, and wondered what made Austin talk so to him. Certainly he was capable of taking care of himself even among the Indians. Had he not demonstrated that, abundantly, during the passing night.

"You'll find me all right, Austin," he said, at length; rising to his feet again. "Confound it all, why don't that 'ere daylight come along? Here I be half froze, and gittin' chillier every minute, and no signs 'at I'll git a chance to stir till I'm froze stiff!"

"'Sh-h!" whispered his companion. "I thought I heard a movement. Do keep your tongue still—you don't know but the Injins are all—"

"*Augh—ooh—augh—oo—ough!*"

A most dismal howl, of which types can convey but a faint impression, broke from Phil's lips before Austin finished his sentence, and the former disappeared from sight with a mysterious rustling. His companion suspected foul play, but before he could move from his track found himself firmly grasped from behind. He recognized the presence of Indians in a moment, and made a desperate effort to free himself.

Notwithstanding the disadvantage under which he labored, the strong settler dragged along his enemies by his frantic bounds, and was in a fair way of freeing himself from their hated grasp. But at the very moment which seemed to promise success, he felt a new sensation, and realized that a lasso had been thrown over his shoulders, confining his arms. Now, indeed, was he a fast prisoner. The savages released their hold upon him, and united to drag him down with the rope. In this they succeeded so well that he was soon thrown upon his back, and then the entire savage horde rushed upon him. The rope was speedily wound and tied about him in such a manner as to prevent all movement of his arms, and then he was hurried away into the forest depths.

For a moment Austin was inclined to berate Phil most soundly for the mishap which had befallen him; for that his imprudence had been a great cause of their discovery by the Indians he did not for a moment doubt. But when he recollected that that individual was in equal peril with himself, perhaps already slain by the blood-thirsty foes of his race, his momentary anger gave way, and he only thought of what was to be done under the circumstances.

"Perhaps it's better as it is," he mused, when reason was enabled to resume her sway somewhat. "I don't think the

raskils intend to kill us—I reckon they'll tek me off with 'em, so we'll be purty like to come acrost t'other prisoners purty soon. Then we shall all be together, and if there is any chance to do any thing we can improve it. I only hope Phil has not been injured, for with all his faults he has a kind heart, and will make a good scout."

In the course of a few minutes the Indians halted, a fire was lighted, and the party gathered around. Austin was placed in the center, and found himself almost face to face with Phil. The latter bore a very crestfallen look, and scarcely seemed to notice his companion in misfortune. His arms were bound, and confined to his body, while cords seemed wound about his frame in every direction.

"Wal, Phil, we've found the Injins!" said Austin, rather dryly.

The one addressed started, and turned an agonized look upon his interlocutor.

"Don't say nothin' about it," he returned. "It's all my fault, and we shall both be killed for it. I made a darned fool o' myself. Aunt Sally allus said I was a fool, and I guess the poor old woman wa'n't far from right. Leastways I've acted like one to-night!"

"No, no, Phil," the other hastened to say, on finding the mood of his companion. "I rather think it's all for the best, arter all. Just let me tell you."

"Wal, if you want to tell me that you're a nigger squaw, or that black is white, go ahead!"

"But listen. We shall be taken off by these Injins, much easier than we could track and follow them. Whenever we come acrost the main body, with the other prisoners, we shall be ready to set ourselves at work. If we can get them away we can get ourselves away, somehow."

"I know that," returned Phil. "But, suppose they don't keer about takin' us off 'there? S'posin' they happen tew stick a tomahawk intew a fellers head, and leave him here?"

"But I say they'll do nothin' of the kind," said Austin, with assurance. "They'll take us with 'em, jest as sart'in as fate. I've seen enough of them to know putty well how they dew sech things. They'll take us home with 'em, and then, if some old Injin or squaw don't want us, or we can't be

Induced to jine 'em, why they'll hev' a big roast, and a good time!"

Phil cowered, and looked around upon the Indians with a beating heart, but he did not speak his feelings.

Their conversation thus far had been carried on in very low tones, while the Indians were holding a council in their own tongue, which was quite as unintelligible to the whites as the grunting of so many porkers would have been.

The party, like many in more civilized life, appeared to be made up of one great brave, and a number of smaller ones. The former was first to speak, and he used his tongue with considerable effect, though it was quite uncertain as to the drift of his arguments. His appeals to the feelings of his fellows, which were quite glowing, to judge from the gestures used, were perfectly irresistible. Pleasure and satisfaction sat upon every Indian visage.

At length he paused, and when he had resumed his seat a murmur of admiration and acquiescence ran through the group. Another, whose social or military *status* seemed next to him who had spoken, arose, and in a very few words expressed the pleasure of himself and companions to obey the wishes of their leader. Thus the council ended.

A tall brave sprung into the branches of a low tree, and soon afterward the clear hoot of an owl sounded forth, so natural that but for the knowledge they possessed of its source, neither of the whites would for a moment have imagined it to proceed from human lungs. The cry was repeated several times, but each repetition was varied. That some intelligence was being communicated to other Indians they did not for a moment doubt.

Preparations were now made to resume the march. Already the evidences that day was near at hand increased. The pitchy darkness was fading away; the forest outlines became more distinct; and the ruddy glow of the council fire was not in such strong contrast with the blackness which lay beyond the circle of its radiance.

Very silently and cautiously the line of march was resumed, Austin and Phil being placed in different parts of the file, and so widely sundered that all communication between them was rendered impossible. In this manner the gang

moved away, each treading in the imprint of his file-leader, while the gray darkness of incipient dawn, the rosy flush of early day, and the full glare of morning sunlight followed each other.

And then the grand orb of life and light rolled high up the heavens; the damp chill of an almost frosty night gave place to the heat of a cloudless October day. Steadily onward they went, mile after mile, and no turn, no pause for rest, no spoken word which the captives could understand, served to break the tedious monotony of ceaseless travel.

Never had the woods seemed so full of game and animal life as upon the present occasion. The freedom and wildness of their sportings seemed to mock the captivity of the white men. Birds, scarce heeding their presence, fluttered and sung upon every hand; while the various quadrupeds, from the noble deer down to the sportive squirrel, bounded away before their approach.

One thing served to give especial pain and uneasiness to Austin. He had fully counted upon joining the main body of the Indians long before the present time, and yet no signs could he discover of their having passed on in advance, or of their being in the vicinity. The band to whom his liberty had been surrendered seemed to move perfectly at will, independent of all others. What more likely than that their destinations should be different? Possibly parts of two or more tribes had made the onslaught upon Pineville; indeed he rather considered it probable, after due reflection. He felt tolerably certain that those about him belonged to the Sioux; but to what particular branch of that divided people he knew not.

While Austin was still meditating over the uncertain position in which he was placed, the savages came to a temporary halt, and soon disposed themselves around a roaring fire. Many of the gang had loaded themselves with plunder from the settlement, and from the stock of provisions thus obtained they soon made a meal. Having received a new supply of tobacco from the same source, they spent an hour in lounging and smoking, before resuming their journey.

Austin had hoped to obtain another interview with Phil at this halt; but in that he was disappointed. They were kept

at a safe distance, and each zealously guarded, so that not a word could pass between them.

At length the signal was given, and the dismal tramp resumed. A portion of the plunder still retained by the savages was loaded upon the prisoners, and their arms unbound in order that they might carry it with safety. This gave a gleam of hope, although Indians with loaded guns walked behind to enforce obedience to their wishes.

Austin felt that by a sudden bolt from the ranks and a race for dear life, he might gain his own freedom. But then he should be leaving Phil to their tender mercies, and his noble soul repudiated the idea in a moment. Until they could both leave together he determined to make no effort in that direction, save in a case of life and death.

Steadily the hours passed on, and the party maintained the same weary pace. Still no signs of the other party. Every moment the prospect that they would meet became smaller. With the decreasing probabilities increased the anxiety of the young men for freedom. So long as there had been an impression upon their minds that they should soon meet those for whom they set out to search, they had borne the captivity quite philosophically; but when that hope was removed, and only a bootless sojourn, and perhaps death, among the Indians, stared them in the face, they began to look eagerly for any chance of escape.

Night came in due time, and proved an angel of mercy to the weary, almost desponding whites. Not till evening shades had fallen, and it became an effort to pick their way, did the savages pause. They then unburdened the prisoners, replaced the cords upon their arms, and stationed a guard over them. Meanwhile, others of the Indians had collected material for their indispensable fire, and proceeded to prepare their evening meal. It was eaten in comparative silence, stinted portions being presented to the whites. That they swallowed every mouthfull presented them with avidity, we need not remark.

After their hunger was satisfied, the party divided into groups, and, with pipe and conversation, seemed to pass an unusually happy hour before throwing themselves upon their blankets, or on the bare earth, as the case might be.

Good-luck had brought Austin and Phil together again, and

during the repast and conversation which followed, they had exchanged ideas generally.

"We must git out on this to-night, some way or another, Phil!" the former muttered, in tones inaudible to any other ear, when he found an opportunity.

"As Aunt Sally says, 'Talk's talk, and work's work,'" was the doubting reply. "Easy enuff tew say git away, but not se easy to go, when the scratch comes."

"We kin git away," said Austin, in confidential tones. "We've got to be bold and cunnin' about it. Wait till the red varmints are all asleep, and then slip away. We kin fool 'em in the dark, Phil, just like a mice!"

Phil shook his head slowly and doubtingly, while his companion continued, as opportunity presented:

"We ain't goin' tew meet them we be a-lookin' fer, that's very sart'in. We never shall hev' any better chance than we shall to-night to git away, and *git away we must*, or it's all up with us. Ye see, they've been awake now for two nights, and if they sleep at all will sleep like logs."

Movements on the part of the Indians here interrupted any plan Austin might have conceived, and from that moment all possibility of talking together ceased. Indeed, they were separated very soon afterward, and placed to sleep upon different sides of the fire.

CHAPTER V.

OUT AND IN.

ONLY ordinary precautions were taken by the savages to guard against the escape of their prisoners. A single sentinel was placed in the vicinity, to keep a thorough watch of all around them; braves stretched themselves to sleep upon all sides, and silence soon stole over the bivouac.

Both the whites slept, though sleep had been far from the mind of either. But they were exhausted, and tired nature asserted her claims in spite of them. Several hours passed

away, and not a movement in or about the Indian camp. The sentinel had long since crouched behind a tree and fallen fast asleep, forgetting in his unconscious state, the trust reposed in him by his fellows. As none of them awakened to discover his remissness, he was allowed to sleep on, while the full-faced moon rolled over far toward the west.

At length Austin awoke. Frightful dreams had filled his sleep with unrest, and finally caused him to start up suddenly. As his eyes unclosed he realized that he had slept very long, especially if he meant to free himself and comrade during the night. The moon still shone so brightly that he could survey the group which lay about the embers of the fire.

Phil was sleeping—he could see that very plainly, and the Indians were all in like condition. He was certain of this, as the heavily-mingled breathing which rose from a dozen pairs of lungs was not that which any savage would feign. But what of the sentry? He was certain one had been stationed, and ordered to keep a close survey of all that might transpire about him. Where was he?

This was a very important question. Perhaps from the dark shadow of some forest tree a blood-thirsty foe was lying in wait for his first movement, which would be greeted by a bullet. The thought was unpleasant. For many minutes he lay, and gazed earnestly at each dark object within range of his vision, until satisfied of its nature. He could see nothing of the guard, and finally began to think it possible that he had returned to camp and fallen asleep. A part of this supposition was correct.

Resolving not to fear that which he could not see, Austin began to creep slowly from his dangerous resting-place, keeping his eyes fixed upon the dense shade of an oak, which grew at a little distance, and which he intended to make a base of operations. Slowly, inch by inch, he neared it, holding his breath in agony, lest his movements should be heard, and the slumbering foe aroused.

At length he gained a safe distance, and starting to his feet, crept stealthily to the coveted shade. He listened for a moment, to assure himself that no alarm had been created, and then began to tug away at the fastenings upon his wrists. To his joy and satisfaction he found that they had been secured

In a very indifferent manner, and almost his first trial convinced him that they could be removed by his exertions alone. Indeed, after very few efforts he succeeded in casting off the hateful cord, which he hurled into the branches of a tree near by.

Gratified beyond measure at such unexpected good-fortune, he swung his arms about for a few moments, till their full use and strength was restored; then proceeded to attempt the liberation of his companion.

Phil was still sleeping, and his dreams were of peaceful things. If his mind was not so active when waking as that of his comrade in adventure, it was certainly more quiet while he slept. All the new and strange things through which he had passed so recently, were forgotten, and again he was with the one to whom his honest heart had gone forth in love.

Suddenly the chain of thought was broken—how, he scarcely knew. When he regained his senses he became conscious that some one was fumbling about his wrists. Instantly came the recollection of his situation, flashing, lightning-like, across his soul. Without any reflection he bounded to his feet; but before he could make any outcry, or awaken the sleepers near, his arm was firmly grasped, and a voice of caution nipped in his ear:

“Sh-h! This way and be careful how ye step!”

The moon's rays assured Phil that his companion was really beside him, free and unconfined. He was not so simple as to lose any time, or ask any questions, but followed Austin's stealthy lead. In a few moments they had reached a safe distance, and paused, while the latter proceeded to cast the cord from Phil's arms.

This was a longer task than it had been to free his own, the bonds having been applied with more care and skill. But it was done, at length, and then the venturesome twain began to plod their way through the forest. Quiet still reigned around. Their escape, daring as it was, had been accomplished without disturbing a single savage.

A few yards from the spot Austin paused, and placing his companion behind a large tree, he whispered:

“Stand here for a minnit! I'm goin' back to git our guns

"I know jist whar' tew find 'em, and we can't afford to let the red tigers keep them, any way."

Phil would have urged his comrade to be careful, but the whole thing had transpired so suddenly, and all was so strange to him, that he dared not trust his voice, even in a whisper. Before he could have remonstrated, had he wished, Austin had turned away to seek the Indian camp again.

As the adventurous young man left his companion's side, his foot struck against something, which, in the excitement of the moment, he took for a decayed log. Imagine his surprise and dissatisfaction when the sleeping Indian guard sprung to his feet and confronted the all-but escaped white!

For a moment neither of them made any movement, the savage being almost as much astounded, and quite as sleepy as the other. Still he was the first to make an offensive movement. Snatching a knife from his belt he aimed a murderous blow at the unarmed man before him.

But Austin Morgan was no ordinary foe. He was quick of sight and movement, as well as strong and massive of build. He saw the movement and easily evaded the intended visitation. The savage was partially carried past him by the force of his own blow, and before he could regain his equilibrium, the strong white had seized his arm. A single wrench caused him to drop the weapon, and in another moment he lay upon the ground.

Had the struggle been silent, Austin's victory would have been very easily won. The savage no sooner saw that he had met more than his match, than he set up a wild howl which brought every sleeping red-skin to his feet. In a moment, they would be down upon the whites! Austin had noticed where the knife fell, and picking it up he gave the savage a thrust, as he attempted to rise. The Indian sunk back with another yell, and the victor turned to flee.

As he did so, he stepped upon the guard's gun, which he quickly grasped, and then started through the forest, calling upon Phil to follow. This the latter was not slow to do, as he could already see the moving forms hastening in his direction. But for the fact that the savages were awakened from a deep sleep, with no immediate idea of the nature of the alarm, it would scarcely have been possible for the whites to

have eluded them a single instant. While they were collecting their scattered senses, and making sure that their prisoners had really gone, Austin and Phil had used every moment in gliding away from the spot, so that by the time any thing like a pursuit was organized, they were so far away that their movements could not be readily observed in the shadow of the forest.

"Here, right this way!" whispered Austin, as they passed over the crest of a small elevation. "Make for those little pines. That is all that can save us!"

His quick eye had caught a glimpse of a dark thicket, some little distance to the right, which not a moonbeam, scarcely the full sunlight, could penetrate. He at once noticed the cover afforded by the rise of ground, and led his companion in that direction, having previously placed the knife in his hands.

It required but a short time to reach it, and they had just passed within its shades when the Indians burst over the roll of ground, and looked eagerly around for their expected prey. No one was within sight, and guessing the truth, some of them started directly toward the place of concealment.

"It's all up!" said Phil, in a whisper. "Why don't you run? They'll kill us this time, sure!"

"Here, up into this tree, quick!" returned Austin, catching the limbs of the one nearest him. "Don't you see by the way they're lookin' round that they don't know whar we be? Come on, and don't make any noise."

"Oh, dear! I can't git up!" sighed Phil, who hung helplessly swaying from one limb. "Dew give a feller a hand, dew! The tarnal critters 'll git me, faith they will!"

It was painful to see the poor fellow's alarm as he vainly struggled to raise himself from the ground. Fear had paralyzed his powers, and driven reason from his brain. Although, ordinarily, he could have climbed the sapling with the greatest ease, he found it an utter impossibility in the present case.

Austin finally lent a helping hand, and the panting fugitive was landed safe among the branches just as the foremost Indian burst into the darkness of the grove. Two or three passed directly beneath the perching whites, rushing hurridly through the gloom, and on to the more open forest beyond. Finding nothing which gave any indications of the escaped

prisoners, they returned, and devoted their energies to a more thorough search of the darksome thicket.

They seemed quite satisfied that those they sought must be near at hand, and after scanning ground and tree-top as closely as possible, resorted to strategy to bring down or out the hidden whites.

"Come down! Me see you—me shoot you not come down!" shouted a stentorian savage. "Come down—me no want to hurt you—come 'long!"

"Hadn't we better git down?" suggested Phil, who almost fancied he felt the bullet crashing through his frame. "If we don't, he may kill —"

"'Sh; nonsense. Don't you see his face is the other way, and that he couldn't see us if he was right here? It's all an Injin trick, consarn the varmints!"

"Me goin' to shoot!" added the Indian, impatiently.

There was no response. Phil cowered down, and grasped a limb with energy, while a cold sweat started forth from every pore.

A moment later the savage discharged his gun, and the bullet went crashing through the branches in a direction opposite to the whites. Seeing that his shot had produced no result, one after another of his companions discharged their guns through the branches, making some noise, and wasting several ounces of lead, but harming no one. A single bullet went high above their heads through the tree which sheltered the missing ones, dropping a severed twig upon Phil's hand.

That individual certainly supposed himself to be wounded, and only by the utmost exercise of his powers of self-control did he avoid crying out. Bringing the supposed injured member to his other hand, he felt carefully for the wound. He was somewhat surprised, and abundantly gratified, to find himself whole. As the Indians had now ceased their wild firing, his spirits rose, and prospective freedom again dawned upon his mental vision.

The savages remained silent for some time; then seemed to hold a consultation as to their future course. This matter was very soon decided, and a fire kindled, around which they stretched themselves, and prepared to pass the time till

morning. Each now followed the bent of his own inclinations. Some relapsed into slumber, others gathered in groups of two or three to smoke and chat.

All this might not have been prejudicial to the whites; but the fact that an evil chance led them directly beneath the important tree to light the fire, was highly so. Soon the smoke rolled up in dense masses, threatening to strangle the concealed ones. This they avoided, to some extent, by making their way to the top of the tree, where they were able to breathe without inhaling the sooty vapor in such stifling quantities. But this was only temporary relief. They could not descend from their lofty perch, and daylight would soon be upon them. Only the dark shadows of the lower branches secured their safety at present—what must be their situation when those shadows were dispelled by the rays of heaven's sunlight?

Cautiously the two men in the tree-top whispered together of their predicament.

"What *shall* we dew?" demanded Phil. "I till yew, I dew think they'll smoke us out, for sart'in sure. Aunt Sally allers said she wa'n't afeard o' nothin' but the Injins."

"Never mind Aunt Sally now," was the earnest answer.

Silence ensued for some mintues. Then Austin bent over and whispered to his companion:

"Hev' ye got any thing heavy in yer pockets?"

"Not a thing. The Injins took all I hed, of every description. All I've got is just that 'ere knife."

"Then let me take that."

Phil passed it over, wondering what strange project his companion might have in his head. The latter took the knife, and weighed it in his hand. It was a short, heavy weapon, and would answer the desired purpose very well.

Bracing his feet firmly, and maintaining his grasp of the upper limbs with one hand, Austin hurled the knife high into the air, and far away over the top of the thicket. Dropping in the branches of a tree, it made its way to the ground by interrupted stages. The result was what the shrewd hunter had anticipated.

The Indians heard the little tumult created, and with a quick word of warning those who were awake grasped their

weapons and crawled away in that direction, confident that they had a clue to the hiding-place of the escaped whites. The sleepers were quickly roused, and followed a few moments later, wondering that they had not already heard the joyful shouts of their comrades.

For the moment the vicinity of the fire seemed to be vacated, and then, if ever, was the moment for their action. Carefully the two men stepped from limb to limb till they stood again in the smoke from the Indian fire. The twigs and brushwood had already burned out to a great degree, and the light it cast was flickering and uncertain. Austin had indicated to his companion the direction they were to take upon reaching the ground, and which he considered most likely to lead them from the vicinity of foes.

A quick glance assured Austin that none of the Indians were near, as they had no suspicion that the coveted game had reposed directly above them for a considerable time. Giving the signal, he sprung to the ground, quietly followed by Phil. Then, as quickly and noiselessly as possible, they glided away through the forest.

Austin's strategic movement had been a perfect success, and not an Indian dreamed that he had been outwitted by so simple a scheme. Knowing that dawn was at hand, and anxious to make the best possible use of what darkness remained, the two men hastened away at full speed, giving little attention to caution after once gaining a safe distance from the thicket.

They had proceeded not less than a mile, scrambling through the forest as best they might. The moon was already down, and profound darkness reigned upon every hand. Suddenly Phil and Austin paused, and grasped each other, under the influence of sudden emotion. There could be no mistake!

CHAPTER VI.

WORSE THAN A MISTAKE.

"'Sh-h! We're right ontew another nest of the confounded critters!" whispered Austin, taking his companion's hand and beginning slowly to withdraw.

Directly in front of them, and not more than three rods away, they had discovered the remains of a large fire. The lighter wood had burned out, and the flames ceased to ascend; but there remained several large sticks, only partially consumed, and from the generous bed of coals came a glow which lighted up the vicinity quite tolerably. A range of large trees had prevented their seeing it before gaining such close quarters.

Even now, while their best thoughts were given to escaping from the dangerous vicinity, they could see several dusky forms stretched about the heated embers. The general indications were that they had stumbled upon a large party; in all probability the main body of the Indian host. So careless had been their movements that both of the young men really felt surprised that they had not been heard, and already pounced upon. The savages, however, still seemed undisturbed, and they proceeded to withdraw, much more carefully than they had approached.

The ground was not peculiarly favorable for such movements in the immediate vicinity of the whites, there being no convenient brushwood for shelter, and the earth being strewn with dry twigs and vines, which rendered all movements precarious.

Still their good fortune seemed in the ascendant, and, after several minutes of wearying suspense, and patient effort, they found themselves in a place of comparative security. So far as distance was concerned, nothing further remained to be feared.

Austin bent his ear in the direction whence they had come, and, after patiently listening, satisfied himself that all was quiet, thus far. Then turning to his companion, he said:

"What ye think of 'em, Phil?"

"Think we's powerful lucky in keepin' clear of 'em so well! Aunt Sally allus said a fool was born to good luck, and I just begin to think she's right about it."

"That ain't what I mean, not prezactly. I want to know what we're goin' tew do with 'em."

"Dew with 'em!" echoed Phil, in utter astonishment. "What *kin* we do? Seems to me, if they don't do any thing with us, we'd better let them alone, and be glad o' the chance!"

"So we would, naterally. But you know, Phil, that *them* air the ones what hev' got our friends with 'em, in all likelihood; so, if we kalkilate to dew any thing for Esther, Melinda, or Aunt Sally, or any of 'em, we've got to make up our minds purty soon as to *what* we'll dew."

Phil hung his head in silence. That a deal of latent courage existed in his uncultivated heart, no one could deny, after the examples he had already given. And yet, it was but natural, that he should shrink from further contact with the bloody-minded Indians, now that he was once clear of them. But, when he thought of the sweet Esther Morgan, to whom his heart had gone forth, in all the fullness of its sincerity, and Aunt Sally, whose care, if questionable in its nature, had been old that he had known for thirty long years—his momentary selfishness passed away, and very soon he replied:

"You know better'n me, Austin. Dew what ye think's for the best, and I'll stan' by ye, if I git roasted alive for it!"

"I don't think thar's much danger of that, though it's possible. But I'll tell ye what I think is best. It must be almost mornin'. 'Taint likely we kin dew much, anyway, before daylight. If you'll stay here, and wait till I come back, I'll creep up that way again, and make sart'in whether they are there or not. That'll be a great step, and, when we once find it out, we can tell purty well what to do arterwards."

Phil shuddered, as he thought of his companion approaching that savage horde again, alone, almost unarmed. But if he had wished to dissuade him, he knew that any such attempt would be futile, and he inquired:

"Ain't thar' suthin' I kin dew while you're off thar'? Don't seem right for me to stay here while you are sharin' all the danger alone."

"No, no; I'd rather go alone. *One* can do such work a great sight better than *two*; I've proved that tew my satisfaction, in huntin'. Thar's nothin' else to be seen tew, so you can wait here. This gun will be but a botheration to me. You take it, but do not use it if you can possibly avoid it."

"I'm afeard you'll want it," returned Phil, hesitating.

"No I sha'n't; my work ain't one for guns. Keep perfectly quiet, and I'll be back in fifteen or twenty minutes."

So saying, Austin moved away very noiselessly, and in a moment was lost to the sight of his companion. Although filled with curiosity and dread, Phil realized quite well that his part must be one of masterly inactivity. He accordingly seated himself beside a large tree, against which he leaned his gun, and fell into such a train of watchful meditations as the circumstances called up.

It is but justice to him to say that his customary rest had been disturbed more during the past two nights than ever before, for the same space of time, in his life. The consequence was, that ere he was aware of it, drowsiness had again overcome him. He leaned against the trunk of an oak, in a very comfortable position, and quite naturally his eyelids closed. He had not intended to sleep; in fact, he would have been seriously startled at the very thought, knowing, as he did, the dangers to which himself and comrade were exposed.

Yet sleep he did, until a sudden start awakened him. In a moment he realized the situation. Darkness had fled, and the gray light of morning already filled the forest. Yet he was alone. Austin had not returned. Startled at the fact, he sprung to his feet, and looked quickly about him. No signs of the absent one were revealed.

"What can keep him?" was the mental question which Phil asked himself, and a deep suspicion of evil answered it. Certainly nothing else *could* have prevented his return.

"I'll look around and see what I can find," he mused. "I must know what has become of Austin."

Even then his heart failed him. For nearly thirty years it had been impressed upon him, day by day, that he was not as other men; prepared to cope with them in matters requiring skill and judgment. Was it probable, then, that he could

successfully compete with the wily savage, trained from earliest youth to deeds of border cunning, and forest strategy? Phil feared that he could not; and yet, the success that had attended him, thus far, prompted him to make an effort toward discovering the fate of his companion.

He cast about him for his gun. Where was it? Certainly he had set it beside him, leaning the muzzle against the tree. It was not there now!

"Austin has been here!" was his first joyful thought. "He has taken away the gun to learn me a lesson of prudence. I need it bad enough, that's certain. I wonder where he is!"

Thinking it possible that the person in question had stepped behind the tree against which the gun had been leaned, Phil made an attempt to do likewise. But his movement was quickly stopped, and the secret disclosed—for he found himself face to face with a stalwart Indian!

The savage held in his hands the lost gun, which he brought to bear upon the surprised white, with a quick movement.

"You my prisoner, now," he said, in half-fledged English. "Come along; Nem-di-man-do want you!"

"Who's Nan—what d'ye call him?" the startled Phil found breath to ask.

"Nem-di-man-do great chief!" returned the Indian, proudly. "White man call him Rolling Waters. Very great chief among Sioux."

"What does he want of me?" pursued the white, hoping to gain some opportunity for stealing away from his interlocutor.

"Mc don' no know. You come—he tell you."

Phil surveyed the savage for a moment more, as he stood there, towering a head and shoulders above himself, with a deadly weapon bearing full upon him, and then he concluded to adopt the Indian's advice, unpalatable though it might be.

He signified his readiness to proceed, and the aborigine grasped him by one arm, slinging the gun across his back, and producing a hatchet with the other hand.

"You go good, or me chop you to pieces!" was the sententious warning.

The giant grasp upon his arm was ample proof to our unfortunate friend that he had nothing to hope for, should he

once arouse the anger of the savage who led him. Making a virtue of necessity, he walked along very demurely, beside his stalwart conductor, casting covert glances in every direction, in the hope of discovering his friend. Until they reached the margin of the Indian camp, there were no evidences that any human beings, save themselves, were within the wide forest.

Meantime, where was the brave, impulsive Austin?

On leaving his companion, he made his way very cautiously toward the scene of the Indian bivouac, avoiding every thing in his path which could by any means betray his presence. Getting quite near, he found that the quarter from which he was approaching was a very open part of the forest, from which he could scarcely hope to discover what he wished to find, without exposing himself. The red glow of the coals revealed to him some bushes upon the opposite side. Could he gain them, the probabilities were that he could make his reconnoissance with safety to himself.

The idea suggested the action. Crawling away, and feeling out any dry twigs or inequalities which might serve to betray him, he made his way, slowly but silently, toward the coveted look-out. He soon reached a point diametrically opposite to that from which he had started. It only remained to gain the shelter of the bushes, which were some distance in advance, nearer the remains of the fire, in fact, than he had realized at the time of setting forth.

Making certain that no impediments existed in front, and that the savages were still sleeping, he crawled along, being careful to keep in the range of the bushes, that any chance quickening of the fire might not reveal him. Already he could hear the breathing of Indians; he was almost among them; a few feet more and the point aimed at would be reached.

He paused within three feet of the bushes. A dark form lay before him, seeming like a section of decayed log. Still it was more than possible that an Indian had strayed thus far from his companions to sleep. Austin bent over to examine the object more closely; to his confusion and consternation it proved to be a sleeping savage.

While the intruder was debating in what direction to move, the recumbent form rolled over, and an arm was thrown

against Austin. The latter had been crouching very low, and the first thought which entered his mind was to throw himself prone in the attitude of sleep, which he did. The warrior roused up at the same time, to see who might be trespassing upon his right of couch.

The red-man did not seem to recognize the prostrate form as that of a friend. He sprung upright, with a growl which reached the ears of others, and revealed to Austin the unpleasant fact that he had penetrated almost to the centre of the sleepers' camp. In an instant they rose upon all sides of him, in such numbers as to effectually cut off all possibility of escape.

With a mental malediction upon himself for the blind infatuation which had prompted him to such an unwarrantable step, he lay perfectly quiet, and waited the movements of the savages. The latter at once gathered around, and for a moment the prospect that he would be instantly sacrificed, seemed most probable to the young scout.

But better counsels prevailed for the moment, and he was at once taken in front of the fire, which was replenished, and a council held, to decide the bold intruder's fate. As a preliminary the savage council subjected him to a rigid system of questioning, with the hope of learning his object, and other matters which might prove of interest to the red-men. Austin answered all such questions in a straightforward and direct manner; but not being upon oath, he paid due heed to the old maxim, which teaches that "the truth, though noble in itself, is not to be spoken at all times."

The Indians seemed satisfied with his statement, and gave him to understand that he would be kindly treated so long as he remained with them and obeyed orders; adding that he would be taken to the chief, Rolling Waters, who wished to see and speak with him.

Though very much doubting their word as to what they meant to do with him, Austin could do no less than comply, and seated himself upon the ground in the midst of the Indians. The first thought which took any decided form, after finding himself inducted to his new situation, was to look about him, and learn, if possible, whether his sister and the maiden he loved were in the same encampment.

His efforts were necessarily very covert, and some time was required to scrutinize such portions of the band as were revealed by the uncertain firelight. That, too, died down, and the prisoner was left in painful uncertainty with regard to the subject which weighed most heavily upon his mind.

Morning was dawning, at length, after an eventful night. The stars were fading away, and gray, misty dawn crept gradually down the trees, till even the leaf-covered bosom of the earth was thrown into semi-distinctness. With the first incipience of the new day a dozen savages stole out from camp, armed and prepared for any hostility they might encounter.

The captive watched their departure with dread and anxiety. Too well his heart told him that they went out to search for any companions of his who might be in the vicinity. Phil was but a short distance away, unskilled in border craft, and unsuspecting any such visitation. Every moment Austin feared to hear the report of firearms—the signal that his friend was found. Surely if he were once discovered he had no hope of his escape; indeed, he much feared that they would both be sacrificed at once to the fury of the Indians.

Time passed on, and finally the savage scouts began to return. One after another came in, reporting that they had found nothing, and seeming to regard the white, who had thus strangely been found in their midst, with a feeling of awe and semi-veneration.

But at length a quick note of surprise was given, as a tall warrior approached, leading the unresisting Phil by the arm. Dark scowls of hate were darted at Austin, as the braves rushed forward to see what manner of man the new-comer might be.

Phil was certainly alarmed at the number of the savages, their anxious manners and hideous war-paint. He fancied that an immediate and cruel death was to be his lot. He had no doubt that Austin had already been massacred, or that they should meet a desperate fate together.

"Let me go," he pleaded, drawing back in despair. "Dear knows I'll never trouble ye ag'in if ye'll only let me go home and see to the place where good Aunt Sally used to

ave! Leave me go, won't ye? I'll never—no, never git in yer way ag'in!"

The red men scoffed at his pleadings, pinched and cuffed him, till Phil began to realize that he had made his lot more bitter by his efforts to escape it. A tall savage stepped up behind him, and pulling his head over his back, whined several piteous sentences, winding up by calling the prisoner a "poor, pale-faced squaw."

"Go ahead, old boss, if ye think you're a creation," shouted the enraged Phil, as he regained his head. "I'll show ye that black beans and sweet corn don't grow on the same stalk, party soon!"

The Indian answered with an insulting gesture, in the process of which his face came quite near to that of his victim. Liberating one hand, Phil quickly struck out with all his strength. The blow alighted full upon the warrior's nose, staggering him severely, and drawing forth plenteous jets of the crimson fluid.

Drawing his hatchet, he sprung at the offender, and would have speedily sacrificed him, had he not been restrained by those about him. For a few moments he glared and growled at the prisoner, but finally slunk away, as he could neither obtain satisfaction from the white, nor sympathy from his fellow braves.

CHAPTER VII.

ONE MYSTERY SOLVED.

"LAW, Phil, if you hain't got here, too! Wal, I never dreamt or sech a time, or you'd never ha' seen me west of the Alleghany mountains."

It was a doleful, weeping voice, and yet one strangely familiar, which sounded upon the young man's ear. Turning in the grasp of those who conducted him, he beheld Aunt Sally seated at a little distance, the very picture of despair. Her eyes were red with weeping and swollen from want of sleep. Her "meetin' gownd" had been sadly tried during the long

journey of the day before. Her bonnet hung by a single string, with a gaping rent in the crown, while her best cap was hanging in shreds about her head and face.

Seated upon the ground, as much apart from the Indians as possible, she was swinging herself back and forth in her misery, when the approach of Phil had drawn her attention. Grief for herself was, in a measure, swallowed by concern for the fate of her unlucky nephew.

"How in the world came ye here, Phil?" she continued, as the Indians having him in charge paused near her. "I thought all the while that you was safe tew hum, and it give me a deal of courage to think *you* was whar' ye could have some care if ye was sick. I know 't'll kill me—bein' snaked off this way; I'm too old to stan' sech awful jaunts. Them that's younger may git along with it, but it's no use for me to think of it; but you hain't told me how you come to be here yet."

"Never mind now, Aunt Sally," was the reply, "I'll tell you all in good time; but I don't keer to hev' all these fellers knowin' about it jist now. Where are the rest of 'em? som'er's about, I suppose."

"Why, yis. Melinda and Esther is over yonder somewhere. Poor Mary Duncan was took along at fust start, but she was kind o' weakly, like, and couldn't keep up; so they—they—"

"No matter Aunt Sally; you needn't say it—I know; but what of the girls? I hope they stan' it well."

"Yis, a great deal better'n a poor old hulk like me. I suppose they'll be tuk along, an' made squaws on; and I'll be buried, off up here in the woods somewhere."

"No, no; don't talk so," urged the more sensible nephew. "If you keep on that way of thinkin' you'll soon kill yourself. I tell you to just pluck up courage, and in a day or two you and the gals will be on the way toward home."

The closing sentence was spoken in a low voice, so that it might not reach the ears of the Indians; but Aunt Sally's feelings were too deeply wrought upon to be restrained, and in a glad tone she exclaimed:

"I'm sure I hope so! Heaven knows if we go much farther this way it 'll wind me up; but what is it—is the soldiers a-comin' on to help us?"

These words drew the attention of the guarding savages, who fancied that their prisoner might be making revelations of an unpleasant character. Raising him from the earth they dragged him away, Aunt Sally pleading with them as they went.

"Now don't hurt Phil, don't! He's a dreadful good boy to heart, if he is a little foolish. Now you won't take advantage of what he don't know, will ye?"

"Him not know much?" asked the tall Indian, who had brought him in, tapping his forehead significantly, and pointing toward Phil.

"No, he don't," was the earnest answer. "He was all but a nateral fool in his younger days. He knows a speck more now, but nothin' to what common folks dew."

"He not know much?" the Indian pursued, pointing toward Austin, who had been brought nearer. "Him too?"

"He knows enuff, fur as I know," returned Aunt Sally. "Leastways, he's allus gaddin' about the wood, which ain't no very good sign for a young man."

"What bring him here?" asked the Indian.

"I'm sure I don't know," was the reply; Aunt Sally, for a wonder, beginning to think it possible that her gossip might be of no advantage to the welfare of the young men.

The interrogator turned away, and soon a second Indian council was being held. Much of the usual formality was dispensed with, merely a few of the leaders of the party gathering in a knot by themselves, and such as had any opinion to express doing so without much hesitation. Among the speakers, the tall warrior who had surprised Phil, seemed to hold a prominent rank, and, whatever his theory might have been, it was urged with commendable zeal. From his gestures it was apparent that he advocated taking the men, as well as the women, away to the head-quarters of their tribe. His proposal was generally seconded, and finally triumphed. The council was dissolved, and preparations at once commenced for the day's journey.

"Here we are ag'in'!" said Austin, as the twain met in the midst of the Indian force. "We are lucky enough to git into a scrape almost any time."

"We'll git out of it ag'in," said Phil, hopefully. "We

know right whar' we be, and the gals are here. They'll git out o' this, and we too, afore two days more; don't you think so, Austin?"

"I hope so."

"Gracious! Hope so? I know it. Didn't the feller what picked me up tell me that we's goin' to be tuk off up to his chief, Rollin' Water he called him? though I don't know what in the world is the use of his bevin' sech a name. If they go to tryin' any such game as that, I'll resk but what we'll be all right yit."

"Well, keep a quiet tongue in your head, or they'll set you up and make a big candle of you, yet!"

"Trust me to fool the cut-throats!" replied Phil, with a sly wink.

"He'll get us all into trouble again," Austin mentally commented, as he watched nervously the effect of his words upon much of the Indians as had heard them.

The latter tapped their foreheads significantly, and smiled through their war-paint, at the young boaster. Aunt Sally's garrulity was working well.

Though assured of each other's presence, the young men and maidens did not meet till the procession was ready to set forth. Then, for a brief time, they encountered each other. What a meeting!

Love, sorrow, fear, all mingled in the few glances which were exchanged, and the words which were spoken. Of all the subjects which lay nearest their hearts neither dared speak. Too many sharp eyes and ears were about. Only Austin, as he passed his sister, found opportunity to say, in a low voice:

"*Hope!*"

The glad smile which danced upon her features, showed how quickly she comprehended the import of that soul-stirring word. And yet, when she had reflected for a time upon the circumstances which surrounded them, what grounds had she for hope?

Was not he, who had spoken the word, equally a captive with herself? Was not that little band of five prisoners strictly guarded by ten times their own number of zealous savages? Whence, then, could they reasonably expect help? Only from themselves, and how feeble the staff!

Before setting out, the men were loaded with such packages as the Indians could fasten upon them; and, thus burdened, they were forced forward, at full speed. The savages traveled fast. It might be that they feared the vengeance of the outraged whites; or that they were anxious to reach their tribe with such rich evidences of their success—possibly both feelings may have tended to hasten their steps.

They traveled rapidly till noon, without any halt, the suffering whites being scarcely able to keep pace with them. But, when the stake is so great that life and death hang in the balance, the utmost exertions will be used to accomplish any desired result. So it was with the prisoners. The men staggered under their imposed burdens, and the women, under the weakness of their sex, which should have been their natural protection. Well they knew that when they became unable to keep their place in the ranks, thirsty hatchets waited to drink up their life-blood. Of this fact, a dreadful confirmation had been witnessed, in the fate of Mary Duncan, who was taken with the others, but barbarously murdered, when the savages found that she could not keep pace with their rapid movements.

At midday they paused, and the Sioux devoured such food as they had, with very little punctilio. Various small bits were offered to the captives, who gladly swallowed them, though, on ordinary occasions, they would have been rejected with loathing. Even Aunt Sally masticated, as best she could, what was brought to her, though, declaring the while, that it "*would* kill her; she never had eaten such food, never in her life; not even when Phil was dependant on her, and she had to beg all they had!"

All too soon, the party was ready to set forth, and the prisoners were ordered to prepare. The packs were strapped upon the backs of the men, their bulk and weight having been increased rather than diminished. Thus accoutered, they set forth for another long, wearying march, through the forest, only sustained by the hope of eventually freeing themselves and those they loved.

During the short respite, enjoyed at noon, they had found an opportunity to whisper a few words to the maidens, which had renewed the waning hope they felt. But, as the long

hours to evening passed on, and mile after mile was put between themselves and home, it was no wonder that their hearts became oppressed again, and that it would almost have seemed a pleasure to lie down and die.

It was quite early when their conductors paused, and a halt for the night was decided upon. The fact was, the savages themselves were getting exhausted, from the length and severity of their victorious war-path. A supper, similar to the food enjoyed at noon, was partaken of, and then the silence of weariness fell over the encampment.

The Indians did not at once retire to sleep, but built several large fires, around which they crowded to enjoy the genial heat, smoke, and converse. The night was rather chilly, and a seat beside a blazing fire was a luxury. Dark clouds had risen, and a damp, cold wind penetrated even the the primeval forest. Near one of the fires Aunt Sally was seated, completely exhausted by the long journey she had been forced to make. At the next, the two maidens sat, locked in each other's arms—pictures of despair and suffering.

At a little distance, beside a third fire, sat Austin and Phil, also worn out by the hardships of the day, but not having forgotten the errand which brought them there. They were a little apart from the savages, and conversed in low tones together.

"We shud' have rain to-night, unless I'm greatly mistaken," said Austin, after having gazed for some time at the darkening heavens.

"O'n, I hope not," returned Phil, shuddering at the very thought.

"Why d'ye hope so? I hope it will come."

"I don't see what you want of any rain. Lord knows we hev' enough to suffer, now, without bein' wet and frozen up at the same time."

"If we kin only hev' a gentle, moderate rain," said Austin sinking his voice to a confidential whisper, "we can jist dew any thing we take a notion tew. I'll bet ten to one that if we git a storm to-night, I'll say good-by to these red-skins for a time, and take a few o' my partikelar friends along with me."

"But the Injins won't be asleep if it rains, and ye can't stir without their susin' of 'ye," urged Phil.

"You wait and see if they sleep or not. But I'll tell you in advance, that you won't catch an Injin lyin' awake unless it rains pitchforks; and not then, if he has any place to crawl into, or a blanket to put over him."

As night came on it came with intense blackness. Not a star was visible. The wild waves of despair never swept with more black and relentless fury over the human soul, than floated those inky clouds over the face of the sky.

The women curled closer to the earth as they resigned themselves to a rest which might be disturbed at any moment, and even the Indians regarded the un auspicious indications with shivering dislike. Only those two waiting, watching men regarded the dark foreshadowing of the tempest with feelings the reverse of anxious. *Their* only fear was that the storm would delay its coming till the following day, when it might be forever too late to serve their purpose.

"Hadn't we better curl down, and make believe drefful tired and sleepy?" asked Phil, as he saw the Sioux preparing themselves for sleep. "Like enough they'll take a notion to separate us if they think we ain't purty well fagged out."

"You are right," was the answer. "Lay with your head near mine, so that we can whisper without movin', if we should take a notion to."

The prisoners threw themselves upon the earth, having precisely sought out the exact position which seemed most likely to further their plans. The cold winds swept in with occasional gusts, sending smoke and ashes over them in plenty; but these they affected to despise.

Fifteen minutes later the entire camp was silent—the savages having posted a single guard and thrown themselves down beside the blazing fires, which had previously been replenished. The flames shot high into the air, and threw their weird light afar into the gloom, rather rendering it distinct than illuminating it. That light enabled the whites to note carefully the disposition of their fellow-prisoners and the Indians, as also to mark the general outline of their plan; all of which was breathed in gentle whispers between vigorous mores.

An hour passed—then another. Still all was quiet, though the wind and blackness yet gave promise of a speedy storm.

The single sentry stood where a tall tree sheltered him from the occasional blasts of wind, and where the warmth of the nearest fire dispelled the piercing chill of the atmosphere. His gaze wandered uneasily from one to another of his sleeping comrades, and he seemed debating within himself how soon he might reasonably expect to take his place among them.

But for a hope that the storm-king would soon visit them, Austin would even now have undertaken the contemplated task. Well he knew that if they succeeded in getting away without raising their foes, the balance of the night would be all too short for them to gain a proper start, in view of the certain pursuit which would take place with the coming of daylight.

He had even begun to whisper the same to his companion, when a large rain-drop fell hissing in the fire near them, and another struck him upon the cheek.

"Good! It's goin' to rain!" he whispered. "We'll wait till the storm gets fairly under way, and then see what can be done."

They had not long to wait before receiving a thorough wetting, as the very floodgates of heaven seemed opened within a few moments, and the waters descended with such fury as to almost quench the fires, and bring every Indian to a sitting posture.

"What did I tell you?" whispered Phil, in a tone of triumph. "That looks a great deal like doin' any thing!"

"Wait a while," returned Austin. "That doesn't look promising, I know; but when they git settled down again, as they will in a few minutes, they'll sleep so sound that there won't be any danger of their waking up again."

"I only hope so," responded Phil, a little doubtfully.

They rose from their uncomfortable position, and mingled with the savages, seeking for some place where they would be sheltered in a measure from the storm. Of course all such nooks and the lee sides of trees had already found occupants, so that after wandering about for some minutes, they returned to the side of their fire, and sunk down in despondent attitudes.

But while passing near the maiden of his heart, Austin had

found opportunity to say to her, in a low, muttered tone of voice :

"Keep an eye out for home, after it gets still again !"

A quick glance showed that she comprehended his meaning, and in another moment they had separated.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE STORM.

For a short time there seemed no limit to the fury of the storm. The wind surged through the forest with great force, uprooting, here and there, a tree, and scattering broken branches all about. The rain fell like a deluge, piercing the thickest blankets, and any clothing, save that made of skins, in a moment. The various fires smoked and sizzled for a short time, and then yielded up the ghost, despite the efforts of the Indians to keep them burning.

As Austin had fancied, the wind abated in a few minutes, and soon after the heavy rain ceased. A soft breeze still soughed through the woods, and rain fell in gentle quantities. The fury of the tempest had passed away, and the soft-falling rain seemed as the sunshine, in comparison with the hurricane of a moment before.

Very soon the Sioux began to think of sleep again. The fires were resuscitated, in a measure, and such as could crowded about them, quite elbowing away the whites, who, with seeming zeal, sought a place near them. In reality, quite content to take the outside range, our friends lay down, having carefully selected their place, and taking in the situation of affairs all about them.

They had still a long time to wait. The wet and growling savages showed no disposition to favor their wishes. While some of them slept, others would be smoking and consulting, so that Phil openly, and Austin almost, renounced the idea of accomplishing any thing that night. The former, indeed

finally fell asleep, satisfied that another day, at least, must be passed in their hopeless captivity.

Austin, on the contrary, did not for a moment relax his watchfulness. He knew that every additional mile toward the Indian country would increase the difficulties of their return. Another day might place them in circumstances where any thought of return would be folly. Influenced by these thoughts, he resolved to make the most of any possible opportunity.

It was certainly midnight, perhaps later, before such quiet begun to reign as would justify any attempt at escape. Then it really seemed to the impatient young man that the fated moment was drawing nigh. He raised his head very carefully, in order that he might listen to what was going on with the more intensity.

All about he could hear the breathing of sleeping Indians. Every figure which the dim firelight revealed was prostrate. No guard had been set—the Indians seeming to regard that as a superfluity. The rain still fell slowly, and the pattering of the large drops from the leaves and branches above sounded like the movements of many cautious feet.

For a brief moment he bowed his head and hesitated. Surely the risk was no greater than the prize warranted. He decided to make an attempt. Carefully he placed one hand on Phil's shoulder, and rocked his body gently to and fro.

"What d'ye want?" the sleeper demanded, in impatient tones. "I ain't goin' tew sow them oats to-day!"

"'Sh-h-h!'" was breathed, so gently that it might have been taken for the wind's softest notes. "Wake up! The time has come!"

Phil rubbed open his eyes, and soon begun to comprehend what was wanted of him.

"What is it?" he at length asked, when daring to trust his voice in a whisper.

"Come, we are all ready," returned Austin. "Crawl right off, and git behind that log; then follow down this bank of the brook till we come to that big tree!"

This was the course which they had marked out early in the evening, and which they had carefully surveyed while light enough remained. Hence there was little danger of their

going wrong in the first and most important stage of their progress.

Very slowly and carefully the two men moved away from the spot, Austin taking the lead and Phil following close behind him. There was very little danger, in the intense gloom, of their movements being observed, unless some savages should come in immediate contact with them. No human eye could penetrate five yards, with sufficient accuracy to distinguish a moving form. Their greatest danger lay in making so much noise as to attract the attention of some watchful savage. Even in that respect the falling rain was greatly in their favor.

They very soon passed the base of a large tree, which had been blown over many years before by some tornado of wind. Its immense body stretched down the bank of a small brook for some distance, and either nature or wild beasts had formed a tolerable path beside the stream the entire length of the tree. Along this the adventurers crawled quite rapidly, there being very little danger of their discovery in the present stage of the scheme.

Some distance further down the creek stood a huge tree, isolated, in a manner, from all of its size, like a giant in an army of pigmies. This had been decided upon as a general rendezvous in the start, and toward it our heroes made their way.

They reached it in safety and silence. Upon pausing beneath it Phil grasped his friend's hand, and said, in an impulsive whisper:

"All goes well, so far. What a fool I was, Austin, to git asleep at such a time! I didn't mean tew. And then, when you went to wake me up, I was dreamin' that Aunt Sally was in a great fume about a piece of oats she wanted sowed. You know I'm a fool, or I wouldn't carry on so!"

"Never mind," was the reply. "That is all over with, and done well. Now I want you to stand here, and take care of the women as I go up and run 'em off. If I should git some of 'em down here, and then git nabbed myself, you'll hear the racket. Mind nothin' about me, but take such as you have, and make for home. I'll bring the rest out all right, in the end. Don't wait a minute arter you hear any

commotion up there, but make tracks at the top of yer speed. I advise ye to walk down the brook a ways, so they can't track ye so easy."

Phil asserted that he understood the directions fully, and then Austin left him, hastening back to camp to carry out the balance of the programme.

He approached it very carefully from another direction, and his heart was elated at finding all in the same perfect state of repose as when they left. He crept up to the outermost band of savages, and just in front of him heard a low moaning. Bending over he found that the voice proceeded from Aunt Sally, who was suffering intensely from the cold and wet, having been debarred any place at the fire by the brutal and selfish Indians.

He crept up beside her, very carefully, and placing one hand upon her shoulder, breathed a gentle note of warning in her ears. The poor woman started up, filled with unutterable gladness at the thought of any delivery from her present state of suffering. Austin, however, pressed her gently back, and whispered in her ear such directions as were necessary for her guidance. Then he carefully withdrew a short distance, and waited her coming.

Very soon she appeared, having stolen away from the Sioux with a skill which would have done credit to an experienced scout. Austin took her hand, and led her a few yards, while he whispered such further directions as would enable her to reach Phil, and to proceed toward home, should any misfortune happen to him or the others.

The poor woman spoke her thanks, and then staggered forward, trembling so violently with mingled cold and emotion as scarcely to be able to stand. The young man watched her till darkness hid her from his sight, and feeling sure that she would follow his directions, turned to attempt the finishing up of his scheme.

He was disappointed, on approaching the place where Esther and Melinda were lying, to find the vicinity lighted up by a strong glow from the nearest fire. On looking for the cause he beheld it in the form of a swarthy savage, who had just ceased from his work of poking up the brands, and seated himself beside the cheery blaze with most provoking coolness.

Was this a failure of all his hopes? Possibly the savage would soon lie down again, and allow the fire to die away.

Even while Austin was hoping so, the Indian, with the utmost deliberation, drew a pipe from his belt, filled it with tobacco, and proceeded to light it. This done he threw himself into an easy attitude, and puffed away, while the impatient Austin heartily wished him at the bottom of the sea, or any other place where he would have no use for either pipe or tobacco.

As wishes, of the most ardent nature, did not seem at all likely to effect any such purpose, the young man began to study how he could best divert the savage's attention, and not endanger his companions. But the more he reflected, the more difficult appeared the task, and he finally gave up the idea; trusting that when the smoker had exhausted his pipe, he would sink back again, and go to sleep.

Slowly, wearily the time dragged away. Puff after puff of smoke rose from the pipe bowl, and when one had faded away and disappeared the savage would emit another. All things earthly come to an end in due course of time, and so it was with the Indian's tobacco. He finally removed the pipe from his mouth, knocked away the ashes, and carefully replaced it in his belt. This done he gave the fire another replenishing, and drew his blanket over him upon the ground beside it.

So far as Austin could see, the other Indians were all sleeping; so he set about approaching the spot where Esther and Melinda were awaiting the expected deliverance. To penetrate thus into the midst of the Indian force was not an easy matter, though that was infinitely more so than getting away two weary, perhaps sleeping, maidens, who were all unused to the strategy of the forest.

Still he did not shrink or pause until he had placed one hand upon his sister's shoulder. The maiden raised her head with a start which clearly indicated that she had been drowsing at the moment.

"It is all ready," he whispered, when she had recognized him. "Crawl back and get under the faint shade of that last tree. Wait there till I come with Melinda."

He repeated the directions again, in order that she might

make no mistake, and then nestled close to the earth while she stole away. He had the gratification of seeing her pass from sight in the right direction, and then he turned to her companion.

Melinda was already awake, the very slight movements of Esther having awakened her from the drowsiness neither of them had been able to resist. Lovers are pretty much alike, the world over. Instead of bending all their energies to an instant escape from the unpleasant vicinity, the twain in question bent their heads together for a moment in a very suspicious manner; and when they raised them again a look of happiness seemed mantling each countenance, which nothing apparent to outsiders seemed to warrant.

Grasping each other's hands, they stole away, in the direction taken by Esther a few moments previous. They were looking for her, when Austin felt his hand grasped, and a low voice exclaimed:

"Quick, brother! Don't you see that our absence is discovered?"

He turned quickly, and upon looking back saw that a quiet alarm had spread over most of the Indian camp, and that only the most decided movements could save any of his party. The Indians were hastening in all directions, and doing it with the utmost regularity and good order. He thought of Phil; but to rejoin or warn him was now impossible. He had barely time to grasp his companions by the hands and hasten from beneath the tree, when the same ground was occupied by savages.

"Do not say a word; keep hold of my hands," he whispered, dragging them across the little creek, and rapidly ascending the opposite bank. "Step as careful as ye can, for if they git hold of us ag'in we shall go clear home with 'em."

The maidens needed little urging to heed the instructions of their guide, and the trio pushed through the forest just in advance of the Indians. Chaos could never have floated in a darkness more intense than that which surrounded them, at the present moment. Now that they were removed from the immediate circle of the camp fires they could distinguish nothing. At almost every step they came in violent collision

with some of the forest trees, and scarce a moment passed but that they stumbled over some offending obstacle.

Now it was that the pattering rain played its most important part. But for its kindly offices it would have been impossible for our three adventurers to have stumbled through the forest in that manner without attracting the attention of their pursuers, and in a dead race their chance would have been small indeed.

At length Austin paused, giving his companions a signal of silence.

"Let me listen a moment," he said. "I can not feel at ease until I understand something of what is behind me."

He did so, but the very agency which had favored his own escape covered the tread of his pursuers, if any there were.

"I can't hear any thing," he said, after a momentary pause. "We will go on a ways further, and then see what we shall do."

"Hark!" exclaimed Melinda Sawyer; "I thought I heard something moving!"

Austin was upon the point of assuring her that it could have been nothing but the rain, when he was conscious of a movement in his immediate vicinity. Before he could comprehend it, a deep guttural voice sounded through the darkness.

"Now me find you!"

The same instant a tall figure bounded upon the scene, and Austin sprung aside just in time to avoid a sweeping blow from the Indian's hatchet. Finding that he had missed his mark, the latter turned upon the white at close quarters, and a fierce struggle ensued.

At the moment of closing Austin had scarcely comprehended the nature of his situation. Nor did it matter. One of the savages, at least, was upon him, and there was no resort but to combat him as best he might.

The brave was a tall fellow, spare and muscular. In mere strength he was superior to Austin, and at the first assault had been armed. But his hatchet had fallen from his hand at the moment of collision, and in the struggle which followed he had no time to draw the knife which stuck in his belt.

Strangely enough the Indian made no outcry. He felt

himself capable of conquering any single foe, and wished to obtain for himself the glory of bringing them back into camp. But in Austin Morgan he found no ordinary adversary. The young man felt his arm nerved with superhuman power, and needed not the sound of Esther or Melinda's voice to incite him to the greatest exertion.

For a single moment it seemed the white had the advantage; then his foot caught in a root, and it was with difficulty he saved himself from falling. The Indian, too, tripped over the same obstacle, and Austin tried his utmost to throw him at that moment, but without success. Each retained his grasp, and each felt a higher respect for the prowess of the other. Moving, as by mutual consent, from the vicinity, they renewed the trial which was, in all probability, to result in the death of one of them.

The second effort was more evenly balanced, and during the long contest neither could have claimed the least advantage. At such close quarters, and in such intense darkness, it became merely a question of brute strength and endurance. If the Indian surpassed in the former, Austin was certainly his superior in wind and muscle.

At length the savage, seeing he could not accomplish his purpose by fair means, sought to gain it by foul. Relaxing his exertions for the moment, he naturally looked for his antagonist to do the same. Nor was he disappointed. Austin did, indeed, relax his vigilance an instant, and but for a single lucky chance the indiscretion had cost his life.

The Indian, finding him off his guard, sprung upon and bore him to the ground, falling upon him heavily. In the disadvantageous struggle which accompanied the fall, Austin's hold became broken. In striving to regain it his hand came in contact with the Indian's knife. Quickly he drew it forth, and at that very instant the fall took place.

Not so much from the hunter's will as from fate, the hilt of the knife was placed against his breast at the moment, with the point in the air. Of course, as the brave descended heavily the keen blade entered his bosom, and penetrated to and through the seat of life!

With a short gasp and groan the red man rolled off upon the ground, and after one or two heavily drawn breaths his

soul fled the clayey casket. Austin sprung to his feet scarcely able to comprehend his singular good-fortune. He certainly expected to find others of the Sioux present, but was reassured when two soft hands were placed in his, and a sweet voice murmured :

"Dear Austin, thank heaven that you are safe! We were so fearful lest you should be injured. But you are not hurt? Say that you are not!"

"Thank fortin', I hain't even got a scratch," was the pleased return. "That Injin seemed to come alone, and he paid dearly enough for his rashness. But let us hasten, and we may leave the vicinity before others find us out."

He grasped his companions' hands again, and having ascertained, as well as possible, the direction he should take, they set forth again, through the dark and lonely forest.

They had traveled but a short distance when they reached the margin of a small creek. All paused, confounded.

"Can it be that we've took the wrong track, and are goin' right back intew the camp?" Austin demanded, in a low whisper. "This seemes like the very stream we crossed before. Let me see."

CHAPTER IX.

NOT HERE—OH! WHERE?

THE young man listened intently, bending his head first in one direction and then in another; but no light seemed to break over his puzzled brain.

"I can not hear a thing," he said, at length. "Likely 'nuff we are right, and may be wrong, I can't tell. Not a star to be seen, nor any thing else. 'Tain't often I get lost like this in the woods; but, blame me if I can tell now where we be."

He stationed his companions where they were, bidding them be very careful not to expose themselves, while he endeavored to find out something positive in regard to their situation. But for the fact that they had come thus far without

encountering any signs of foes, he would have felt certain that they were returning by the very route they had taken in leaving the camp. It was quite possible that his idea of direction had become confused during the struggle with the Indian, and in the monotonous blackness of the forest there was nothing to set him right.

He crossed the stream, and proceeded along several yards from the opposite bank, looking anxiously for any signs of the red men or their bivouac. He saw and heard nothing.

More than ever confused, he paused, and endeavored by a strong effort of his will to dissipate the uncertainty hanging over him. But reason and will alike were powerless.

"If I could only make out which way the wind courses," he thought, as a gentle puff went over his head.

He tried to observe, but the movement of the air was so gentle as to be imperceptible. Satisfied that he could set himself right by gaining the direction of the wind, he lost no time in climbing a tree, and was soon perched amid its branches, where he was fully exposed, both to the wind and rain.

Here he was not long in settling the uncertainty, and making out his own relative position. With the news thus secured he hastened to rejoin the maidens, who were waiting anxiously for him.

"It's all right," he said, in answer to their earnest questions. "We've nothin' to dew but go ahead, and if we don't run in with any of the red-skins we shall be safe."

"Then this is not the creek we crossed?" Esther asked, with a very relieved expression.

"No, sister. Don't you recollect that a little while after the Indians came to a stop they crossed a creek?"

"Yes, I recollect it now."

"Wal, this is the one. So you see we're on the back track, any way. I doubt if they are lookin' for us in this direction at all."

The result seemed to confirm his reasoning. They proceeded in the same direction, as nearly as possible, for some time, and no indications appeared of the savages being in that part of the forest.

Somewhat exhausted by the difficulties of their nocturnal

light, the party paused, and seated themselves upon a fallen log. The rain seemed to have ceased, though the big drops still fell from the trees. Here and there a single star could be discerned through the foliage, but the greater portion of the heavens was still veiled by the dark clouds which spread aloft like a death-canopy.

"It will be light soon," said Melinda Sawyer, pointing to the glittering stars which were visible. "For one, I shall not be sorry, for I feel as though half the bones in my body were broken already."

"A little starlight will help us more than it can the Injins," returned Austin. "If we get a good start while it is dark, I shan't feel much afraid but that we can keep it till we get to Pineville. But, if we only have a little start, and they catch our trail early in the morning, it is more than likely we shall have to go with them, after all."

"Dear; let us go on," urged Melinda.

"But Phil and Aunt Sally—where are they?" asked Esther, as she recollected that they had not been alone in captivity or escape. "Where are we going to meet them?"

"That's about the only thing that troubles me," replied Austin. "I meant tew hev' come off all in a body, if the thing was possible. But, I told Phil if any disturbance happened to make his way back home with such as he had, and I would take care of myself and the rest. What has become of him I don't know, nor I can't find out, as I see; unless we should happen to come acrosst him here in the woods, somewhere."

"You don't suppose the Indians have picked him up again, I hope," urged Esther, whose heart swelled with pain at the very thought. "We shall be likely to find them off here in the woods, shall we not?"

"I hope so, sister; but we can't tell beforehand. We'll go on and make sure of ourselves, and then if he don't appear, I'll go back after him. I have made up my mind to stan' by the lad, as long as he needs any help."

"I am so glad of that!" returned the sister, in an undertone.

After waiting a few minutes longer, Austin became convinced that delay would avail them nothing. Instead of an

open starlight, as they had hoped, the few twinkling orbs which had appeared were soon shut in. The wind shifted to the north-east, and begun to blow much stronger and colder than before the rain.

Pained, but not disheartened, by these adverse circumstances, the trio took their way forward again, adopting a different mode of march from that previously pursued. Austin led the way, feeling out and guarding against obstructions as much as possible; while the maidens came close behind, following in Indian file, and each keeping hold of the garments of her file-leader.

In this manner they made much better progress than before, and it was incomparably easier for the females. They were no longer subjected to bruises and falls; and if their progress was slow, they reflected that it was, in all probability, so much gained upon the Indians, who could make no decided pursuit before morning.

One after another the weary hours passed, and daylight was again approaching. Several times they had been compelled to stop for rest, and at each stopping-place they had listened anxiously for any signs or sounds of Phil and Aunt Sally. But on every occasion they had been forced to proceed without any traces of the missing ones.

"Maybe I done wrong in comin' off an' leavin' on him," said Austin. "I never shall feel right about it if any harm comes to the poor fellow. But then, what could I hev' done if I'd stayed round there, and tried to help him? I couldn't git whar' he was, and if the Injins picked him up 'twas done right off. If he got intew the woods afore they nabbed him, I'll warrant Phil 'll take keer of himself and Aunt Sally. More'n ten chances to one if I'd tried to stay and help him we should all hev' got intew the Indians clutches again, and I'll warrant none of us wants to go home with them red beasts."

Morning came at length. No sooner did its beams light up the forest shades than the three wanderers pressed forward with all their strength, and traveled rapidly till the sun was well up. Vigorous exercise was needed, much of the way, to keep the chill wind from quite benumbing them. But, when the warm beams of the sun began to pour into the forest, and

dispel the gloomy dampness, it neutralized, in a great degree, the effect of the wind.

Seeking out a secluded nook, Austin conducted the maidens to it, remarking as they went :

"You need rest; lie down here and try to sleep for an hour or so, while I look around for any signs of Phil, and try to find some food. Besides, I ain't quite sart'in whereabouts we be, and I want tew make that out if possible."

With numerous cautions and warnings, requesting him to return soon and satisfy the fears they should constantly feel for his safety, they saw him depart. Seeking out the dryest and warmest corner of their retreat, the two girls endeavored to follow his suggestion.

Melinda being a trifle less robust than her companion, and consequently more worn upon by the severe ordeal through which they had passed, soon fell asleep; but Esther tried in vain to woo the drowsy god. Endeavor as she would, sleep was out of the question. After trying till she was satisfied of the impracticability of the thing, she rose to her feet, and commenced pacing up and down in front of her unconscious companion.

"If I can not *sleep* I can at least *watch*," she mused. "It is possible something may transpire to require my assistance; who knows?"

For some minutes she paced thus, and then a desire to see Austin crossed her mind.

"I wonder where he is?" she repeated involuntarily. "I must see if I can not espy him."

She left the little nook, and moved out very carefully into the forest. Nothing could she see of the absent one.

"I suppose he must be some distance away," she mused. "I had better be back in that nook where he left me."

She turned to retrace her steps.

Melinda Sawyer had just begun to doze, as it seemed to her, when she awoke. Looking around she saw that she was alone.

"I wonder if Austin has come?" she mused. "Esther is gone, and she would not be so imprudent as to venture forth alone. I suppose he found me asleep and did not wish

to disturb me. Perhaps Phil and Aunt Sally have come while I slept."

Adopting this supposition, Melinda experienced no immediate uneasiness. She arose to her feet, replaced her wandering hair as well as possible, and smoothed down her soiled and torn garments. Then seating herself she waited for the return of the absent ones.

What seemed to the lovely maiden a long time passed, but in reality but a few minutes could have flown since she awoke. Still, no one came, and she really began to feel alarmed. Could it be that they had gone and left her? No; she dismissed the thought before it was really conceived. Certainly they would never abandon her.

Could any thing evil have happened to either of them? she asked herself. That seemed much more probable, and the thought sent an indelible pang of anguish to her heart. Under the influence of the emotion she climbed the bank which sheltered the little nook in which she had been reposing.

No one was within sight. She alone seemed the only human being in these wilds. What a sense of fear and desolation swept over her shrinking heart! Once or twice she was upon the point of calling out, but a little reason checked her. Both of the missing ones knew of her whereabouts, and if they failed to come to her it was only because of some insurmountable difficulty.

More frightened at the utter loneliness that surrounded her than she would have been at the presence of an enemy well armed, the girl retreated to her sheltered corner, and seated herself upon the ground again, to wait the coming of her friends. Possibly Austin had been detained and puzzled in laying out their proper course; she could explain his absence in that manner, but what could have kept Esther, or where could she have gone?

Some time longer she waited, and finally was roused from her momentary abstraction by hearing a footstep above her. With the glad thought that they had come at last she sprang up and turned to meet them.

She encountered Austin, but he was alone.

"I've made out the way, sure enough," he said, springing down the bank; "but I can't find any thing to eat. Not so

much as a berry or plant. I suppose we shall have to starve to it a while, on such nuts as we can find."

"I've no fears of starving," absently answered the maiden, who was looking back for the appearance of her companion. "But where is Esther?"

The young man glanced around with a startled air.

"Isn't she here?" he demanded.

"No; hasn't been here for some time!"

"Where did she go—when?"

"I don't know. I fell into a doze, and when I waked I was alone. I thought you had come back, and she was with you, so I didn't look for some time. When I did, she was gone, and nothing to be seen of her, any where."

"Well, that beats all," replied Austin. "Did you look in the creek?"

"I didn't."

A small stream ran near them, and toward it they both sprung; but an instant's examination convinced them that there was no possibility of her having drowned in that shallow stream. The water was scarcely six inches in depth, and flowed with a steady, tranquil current.

"She must be somewhere about here," said Austin, decidedly. "She would not have wandered far, and there's no Injins about. I've been all 'round, and I should have seen 'em if there had been any."

"But you didn't see her," urged Melinda, "and an Indian would have been equally likely to have escaped your vision."

"I reckon not, 'cause if there'd been any Injins there'd most likely be more'n one of 'em, and all of us would have stood a smart chance of bein' picked up; but never mind that, *she* must be found before we stop to speculate much."

Together the anxious twain conducted a thorough search of the vicinity, tracing the bed of the creek for some distance, and investigating every place where it was possible any accident could have happened to her. But all their efforts were unavailing, not the slightest trace could be discovered.

"We'll go back, now, and see if we can track her," observed Austin, at length. "Possibly we may find some trace of her in that way."

An anxious search was at once undertaken, and kept up for some time longer, but ended as all previous efforts had—no trace could they discover.

"Perhaps you might call her," observed Melinda.

"It's dangerous, but I'll try it," responded the youth.

For several minutes the forest echoed to their mingled calls, and after each shout anxious ears listened for any response; but none came. Austin threw himself upon the ground, and bowed his head upon his hands.

"What will you do now?" Melinda asked; when he rose to his feet again.

"I'm goin' to see you safe home again," he returned, decidedly, "and then I'll find out what has become of Phil and my sister, or—or I'll fail; one of the two."

Melinda would have urged him to seek his sister at once; but to this he would not listen.

"No, my dear gal," he said, "I have nobody left but you, and if I should leave you I might lose you, too. I'll take you home, where you'll be safer than here in the woods, and then I shan't have my mind divided. Come, we'll go now."

With heavy hearts they moved from the place where one of their number had so mysteriously disappeared. Was there a fate resting over them?

CHAPTER X.

AN EXPERIMENT.

WE left Phil Wimbles standing alone beneath the trysting tree. For some time he stood gazing into the darkness, or rather at it, and trying to realize that he had been intrusted with a mission so important. That Austin Morgan would repose so much confidence in *him* seemed almost incomprehensible.

Soon he discerned a moving form, or rather heard the movements of some one approaching, and drew carefully behind

the tree till he should ascertain who it was. The words he would use, should it prove Esther Morgan, were already upon his tongue. But no! a low, muttering voice, as it drew near, soon convinced him that it was none other than Aunt Sally. While his hopes were somewhat blasted in respect to the person, he certainly rejoiced that Austin succeeded so well at the outset.

"Phil! be you here?" hissed a low voice.

"Here I be," he replied, advancing and taking her hand. "But don't make any noise, or you will start up the Injins."

"No, I ain't agoin' to stay here long enuff tew make any noise," was the muttered response. "Come, Phil, let us be a gittin' along away from this."

"No, no; we must wait for the rest of them," returned the young man. "Austin and the gals will be along in a few minutes, and then we'll all go off together."

"Never you mind him and them," chided Aunt Sally, pulling away at his coat-sleeve. "He can take keer of 'em, he's nothin' else to dew. They ain't so old and clumsy as I be—and I want you to come along with me."

"I sha'n't do any thing of the kind," replied Phil, decidedly. "Austin told me to wait here for him, unless he got intew trouble, and I'm agoin' to dew it. A purty feller I'd be, to run off when I'd promised to wait."

"Well, wait till the Injins finds out what's goin', and come along and nab us all ag'in," said the old dame, spitefully. "You won't hev' another chance to git away ag'in. You'll be walked off up to the Injin country, and kept thar' if ye ain't burnt alive, and yer poor old aunt'll be killed and buried away in the woods, where nobody kin find her grave. But, I don't suppose you'd care much, if any, if ye could only look at that Esther Morgan once in a while; I dew think the critter has bewitched ye out o' what little sense ye ever had!"

Aunt Sally was growing earnest in her denunciations, and seemed to quite forget that she was in a very dangerous vicinity.

"If you don't make less ado about it we never shall git away," cautioned Phil. "You ought to know that we're close to the Injins, yit, and if you don't keep a check-rein on your tougue it's goin' tew be wuss for ye."

"Then come along!" was the sullen rejoinder. "You know I'm old, and can't travel as them silly-brained gals can."

"I know you're old; but that doesn't make any difference. Suppose we stray off intew the woods? I don't know where to go, and how's Austin goin' to find us?"

"I'll risk but what we kin find the way. I never was in any place but what I could find my way out yit."

"I ain't goin' to try. So, if you want to make the most of what time there is, set down and rest yourself."

"I'm sure I never brought you up to use me so!" sniffed the dame, as she seated herself, after relinquishing the attempt to urge Phil away.

Minutes passed, and no movements in the dark forest. The silence seemed interminable. Aunt Sally continued to growl, and Phil waited with unspoken anxiety for the appearance of his colleague. And yet, he was certain that the adventurer had not been detected, as not the slightest sound had reached his ears from the direction of the camp.

"Only think what a ways we might hev' gone?" at length broke forth from Aunt Sally's lips. "All this time hes been wasted, and, wuss than that, acause I'm half dead with the cold, when we might jest as well hev' kept warm by walking."

"I tell you to be still; it's all right. There—he's comin' now!"

A step certainly sounded close beside the speaker, and he bent forward to catch the first glimpse of the new comer. At the same moment Aunt Sally gave a dismal howl, which brought the startled Phil upright instantly.

"Oh, dear! Help—murder—fire!" screamed the frightened dame. "A dre'dful Injin hes got me! Come quick, Phil, he's achokin' me!"

Judging from the tones of the old lady's voice, she was not yet strangled. But the party addressed was dutiful under all ordinary circumstances, and sprung forward to her assistance.

Before he could place a hand upon the savage, in whose grasp the poor old lady was struggling, he felt his own progress arrested, and a grum voice whispered in a low growl:

"Me want you 'gin!"

Without pausing to consider the effects of his blow, Phil turned and delivered a right-hander in the direction of his

adversary, which sent the red-man staggering back a pace. But, even as he struck, the white saw several other dusky figures in the back-ground, and turned to flee. The thought which crossed his mind was, that if he could not save Aunt Sally, he might get away, and hang around the Indian band, till some opportunity presented for assisting her.

But the idea was crushed in the bud. Upon turning he found himself in the grasp of the very savage who had surprised and taken him prisoner once before. The youth struggled for a short time, but found himself utterly unable to break away from that giant grasp.

"Now me got you ag'in," the Indian said, dragging his charge along toward the camp, from which he had stolen an hour or so previous. "What for go 'way? No think Nem-di-man-do want to see? No think Qua-te-wha find you, take back ag'in purty soon?"

Phil did not reply, for he knew not how to speak. The brave did not seem to regard his silence, but stalked proudly along, keeping a strong hold upon the arm of his charge.

A little distance behind came Aunt Sally, in the custody of another warrior, while the balance of the party continued to scour the woods for those who were still missing.

As they reached camp, Phil gave a searching glance about for his companion, and was gratified to find no traces of any white person, save himself and his aunt. True, he expected each moment that they would be brought in, but even their temporary success seemed to give him unbounded satisfaction.

No sooner were they in the center of the camp than strong cords were produced, which were thoroughly tested, and then the hands and feet of the prisoners were bound in the securest manner possible. This done they were placed upon the ground beside a fire, and one of the Indians, with a loaded gun, took his station over them as guard.

"Now you go run," he said, sarcastically and threateningly "Run away a little and me shoot you. Me like to shoot you Me take off hair and hang him to my belt!"

He shook a bloody scalp, as he spoke, which was suspended in front of him. Aunt Sally shrieked, and seemed almost upon the point of fainting, while Phil felt such a chill pass over his heart as had never frozen his blood before.

"This is all your work, Phil!" whined the former, when she could recover her speech. "If you'd a gone on as I wanted ye tew, all this wouldn't hev' happened!"

"It's too late to growl over that now," said the one addressed. "I did my duty, and if I was unlucky, it ain't my fault."

"Stop that talk—me scalp!" growled the savage guard.

"Oh, dear; I'll never say another word!" exclaimed the voluble-tongued dame, placing one hand upon her head, to make certain that the scalp still remained in its place.

The search for the fugitives was continued till daybreak. Up to that moment no traces of the missing ones had been found. Phil was highly gratified at this, and felt strong hopes that the balance of the party would escape.

But a short time after daybreak a commotion took place among the Indians. One of their braves had been found in the forest, run through by his own knife. The ground all about bore evidences of a struggle, and it seemed quite certain that the deed must have been done by the escaped whites. A trail had been found, leading from the spot, and a party at once set out to pursue it, with the intention of killing or capturing and bringing back the absconding party. Which method to pursue, was left to their own judgment, upon overtaking them.

Soon after this delegation set off, the line of march of the principal body was taken up again, and they proceeded toward their forest home, bearing the body of their fallen comrade. Their pride had evidently been injured a great deal, by the thorough manner in which they had been outwitted by the escaped prisoners, and many an evil glance was cast at the two who remained with them.

All day they marched, though not so rapidly as before, and, upon stopping for the night, the captives were secured in such manner as to prevent any possibility of escape. A guard was likewise stationed, who was far from forgetting his duty; and though Phil would have been delighted to make another trial of his skill in outwitting the savages, he was fain to keep very quiet, and counterfeit sleep, even when the feeling was far from him.

The following day was similar to the last, and when it

closed into night, the Sioux had reached their home. In the midst of the forest they had planted some fifty lodges, and made the place their summer habitation. It was in a pleasant situation, beside a rolling stream, and some of the forest about had been trimmed up, to admit of their corn-fields. The golden grain was still unharvested, and before reaching the head-quarters of the tribe, they were obliged to pass through large fields of it. In some places a solitary squaw might be seen cutting down an armful of the stalks; but, all such labors were abandoned upon the approach of the warriors, and a dense crowd rushed forth to meet them, and learn of their exploits.

The scene which followed can not be adequately described. It was a mixture of savage joy and triumph; grief and wailing; squaws, warriors, papooses; dirt, filth, and corn-cakes. Phil would gladly have been spared the spectacle; but he was at their mercy, and fain to comply with each whimsical command.

Two braves finally separated from the balance of their dusky companions, and each taking charge of a prisoner, led them away. They paused in front of a lodge more grand in its exterior decorations than the others, and waited for some time. Then a tall, pinch-featured savage stepped forth, and, after gazing upon the two prisoners for a while, turned away with an expression of contempt.

He addressed some question to their conductors, and when answered in the affirmative, turned toward them once more.

"What you pale faces do?" he asked in tolerable English.

"Oh, we can do almost any thing," returned Aunt Sally, with eagerness.

"You make corn?" he asked, indicating the fields through which they had just passed.

"Oh, yes," returned the venerable lady, as she pulled away a shred of her cap.

She was blissfully ignorant of what he might mean by making corn; but, realizing that she stood in the presence of Nem-di-man-do, who was to make the final disposition of herself and nephew, she intended to make a good record.

"Ugh! Me try you!" he grunted. Then turning to Phil, he continued:

"You make corn?"

"Guess so," was the puzzled reply. "I can dew any thing to corn I ever seen done!"

"You shoot gun, too?"

"A little. Better'n any of your braves, I kalkilate."

"Red-men no shoot like white man," returned the chief. "Me want you to stay and be Injin—learn Injin to shoot good like pale face. Yes."

"He'll tell ye to-morrer," put in Aunt Sally. "He isn't jest right by nater. We did think he's a born fool, but the boy has picked up some, lately."

The interlocutor gave a grunt of satisfaction, and ordered the prisoners to be taken away. They were conducted to one of the lodges, which was partially filled with corn, and here they were given to understand the night would be passed. The construction of the lodge was such as to secure their safety under ordinary circumstances.

The space covered at the base was about sixteen feet in diameter. Stout poles were sunk in the earth, and set around in a circle, meeting at the summit, and forming a right cone. At no place between the poles could a man have crowded his body through, and only one opening was left. This was a moveable pole, which was fitted and pinned to a socket, so as to make it equally secure all about. The frame-work thus formed was covered with bark and straw—corn-stalks being frequently used for repairing purposes.

Into this building the two were thrust, with the simple command to "sleep." But those having charge of the stores seemed to think better of it, and presently a piece of corn-bread and a slice of venison, passably cooked, was brought in for each. These were eaten in silence, and then Phil set about preparing a resting-place for Aunt Sally.

The stalks of the corn, with which the lodge was partially filled, formed a very tolerable material, and after a little time, the young man had prepared a tolerable bed of husks and leaves for his aged relative. The poor woman was too exhausted even to find fault, and threw herself down with a sigh of mingled thankfulness and despair; thankfulness that the long journey was ended, and despair at the circumstances surrounding her.

Not so with Phil. Now that he was reasonably certain of life for a few days, he began to scheme and canvass in his own mind, how he should best circumvent the designs of the savages. But he was too tired and sleepy now to plan much, and hauling down a bunch of corn, he spread it out so as to form a rough couch, and threw himself upon it. In a few moments the prisoners had forgotten their unenviable situation in nature's sweet oblivion.

Daylight was beginning to penetrate the crevices of the lodge when Phil awoke—and he felt stiff and sore from the severe exercise to which he had been subjected. But this he heeded little. Despite his exhaustion a thrill of vigor, such as he had seldom experienced, passed over his frame. He felt that all their future rested with him.

"I've been told for thirty years that I'm a fool," he mused, peering forth between the lodge-poles. "Now I'll show Aunt Sally that she's slightly mistaken. I'll show these red-skins, too, that they can't fool us pale-faces, not any more than they can beat us at shootin'."

Aunt Sally rose betimes. She, too, was worn and weary, but consoled herself, after the usual amount of grumbling, with the reflection that another long day's march was not before her.

"We might jist as well hev' been to hum, or on the way, if you'd only have heerd to me," she remarked, after gazing out upon the Indian encampment. "But you thought you knew best, and so we bring up here."

Phil was going to assure her that he still intended to get home, and take her with him, when the pole which served as a door was removed, and two Indians stepped in, with a summons from Rolling Waters, the chief.

The two captives followed the lead of their guides, and soon stood in the presence of Nem-di-man-do. His visage was that of a low and crusty savage, without one redeeming trait. Sensuous brutality was stamped upon every feature, and twinkled in the gleaming little eyes, which looked in every direction, rather than forward.

The chief received them with a mocking smile, and, having satisfied his curiosity with a long scrutiny, he proceeded to make known his purpose.

"Pale-faces great men," he begun, speaking the English tongue, after his own style, quite fluently. "Pale-faces have much money: Pale-face live in big house, and have plenty *nigger* to do his work! Me goin' to be great, like pale-face. Me make pale-faces git corn; me sit in wigwam and be great man! Now you make corn. You do good, me send braves for more pale-faces. You not do well me roast you! Now you hear?"

The whites could not deny that they heard and understood his meaning. But the idea of being made slaves to the Indian did not seem exactly palatable to them. However, as they were in the power of the red-men, and a fearful fate was threatened in case of any failure to meet his expectations, they bowed, and responded that they would try.

"That good. Me go see you work," returned the chief.

A morsel of food was served to them, and then a singular procession took its way toward the Indian corn-fields.

CHAPTER XI

THE WHITE SLAVES.

ON gaining the fields, the prisoners were provided with dilapidated scalping-knives, and directed to commence the harvesting of the field which lay before them, and which seemed the individual property of Rolling Waters. As the savages had abundant use for all parts of the corn—the stalk was severed close to the earth, and then conveyed to a lodge answering the part of a store-house, where it was afterward to be husked.

The chief remained for a time till he seemed satisfied that the whites would fulfill all he had anticipated.

"Now me be great chief, like pale-face," he said. "Me steal enemies and make them raise me corn. Make them catch fish and get furs! Oh, me very great chief now."

He seemed entirely pleased with the results of his experiment, and rubbed his hands together with perfect satisfaction.

Thus far all had proved as he had anticipated, and he did not bring himself to consider whether any thing in the future might mar his pleasure or not.

Calling up the tall brave, Qua-te-wha, the chief gave him particular instructions in regard to the work to be performed, and detailed to him the plans he wished carried out. Having thus appointed an overseer, in due form, Nema-di-man-do withdrew, leaving the laborers under the eye of his agent, who, with gun in hand, sat and smoked lazily.

The forenoon rolled slowly away, and though neither of the prisoners worked immoderately, Rolling Waters announced his delight at their progress, and declared that his people should be surfeited with slaves. Aunt Sally was allowed to prepare their dinner, which she was much pleased to do; and then the balance of the day sped in like manner.

After supper, and the good dame found that she was expected to cook, not only for themselves, but for such of the Indians as chose to test her culinary skill, they were remanded to the same lodge which they had occupied the previous night.

The old lady was well worn out, but Phil had no disposition to retire as yet. Seating himself beside the opening-pole, he gazed forth through the apertures, watching such of Indian-life as passed before him. It may be that he was thinking, at the same time, of some manner in which he might accomplish that which had now become the object of his endeavors.

But whatever may have been the nature of his reflections, they were cut short by a commotion among the savages, many of whom seemed running toward a point of interest which he could not see. In a moment a deadly chill came over him. What more probable than that another band of captives was coming?"

"Poor Austin!" he said, peering as far as he was able in the direction of the tumult. "So you wa'n't a bit more lucky than I, arter all. And the poor girls—I suppose they are there, too! There's one thing certain—Esther Morgan shan't be put to work in the fields cuttin' up corn, like a nigger, if I can help it; and I declare I guess I can!"

The lover, in his nature, was getting impulsive.

Soon a motley group began to appear, and he realized that

the cause of his anxiety would soon pass before him. Twilight was at hand, but had not yet fallen so deeply that he could not easily distinguish features at a short distance. Pressing his face against the wood, and straining his eyes so that he should make no mistake, he scanned each figure as it drew near and passed.

For some time he saw nothing but Indians, of every size and age; but finally he observed a tall, muscular brave, who appeared to be leading a second person by the hand. This, no doubt, was one of the captives; but so compassed about by the bawling Sioux that for some time the anxious watcher could make out nothing.

Presently, however, the throng opened, and with a low cry of surprise Phil drew back. They were exactly opposite the prison-lodge, and there could be no mistake. That poor, trembling form—he would have known it anywhere. Esther Morgan was passing before him!

Recovering his equanimity in a moment, he pressed his face again to the opening, and looked out for the balance of the party. To his surprise none others came. The solitary maiden was alone with that horde of savages? What could it mean? Where were her companions?

"I see how it comes," he moaned, when all was silent again. "Austin was rash, and some of the red-skins took a notion to lay him over. Poor fellow, he was my best friend—that is the best *man* friend I had. Well, all I have in the world is here with the Injins, and why not—? No, I won't do that. Who's goin' to be a slave all their life? I can git away from here, and I'll do it, sooner or later."

His mind filled with plenty of food for reflection, Phil sought his bed among the cornstalks, and lay, for many a weary hour, plotting, planning, thinking. It was midnight when he fell asleep, and in the morning he arose weary and exhausted.

His first impulse had been to acquaint Aunt Sally with the presence of Esther; but maturer reflection during the night had decided him to hold his peace. He would keep all his plans and schemes in his own head till the last moment. If he should form any successful plan, the merit should be his own; if a failure, no one else should be involved in it.

Another day of wearying toil followed. During the forenoon, Phil employed his energies to discover any traces of Esther, but without any effect. He was seriously alarmed at the seclusion in which she was evidently being kept. Had she been employed in the fields, even though her task might be hard, he should have felt satisfied in some degree. As it was, a fever of agony pervaded his frame, and he constantly imagined dire evils to have befallen the idol of his heart.

At mid-day they returned to the village for food, and here Phil employed eyes and ears in the vain attempt to learn what had become of Esther. He even strayed about so far as Quate-wha would permit, and, under an exterior of simplicity, kept every sense awake to the solution of that one mystery. But all his efforts proved unavailing, and with a heavy, anxious heart he took his way back to the fields.

Some time afterward he chanced to look upon a neighboring field, in one portion of which several squaws were at work. At a little distance from them he saw another group, which quickly arrested his attention. A small-framed Indian, holding a gun in one hand, was directing the movements of a female.

It needed no second glance to assure the lover that the latter was Esther. For a moment he felt a sensation of relief, and then his soul was filled with bitterness. To see the one that he loved most upon earth subjected to the base lot of a *slave*, was certainly no pleasant spectacle. But it removed a worse fear, and, as there was no remedy, it must be submitted to, till his own brain and energy could devise a remedy.

Slowly the afternoon passed away; it seemed tenfold longer now that Phil's eyes wandered so often to where the maiden was toiling beneath a sultry sun. But, often as he looked in that direction, he never saw her eyes raised toward the field where he was laboring. He really believed that she was thus far ignorant of their presence.

Phil and Aunt Sally left the field while Esther was still at work, and the former began to fear that he should lose sight of her altogether. But on looking up, after bringing an armful of wood to supply Aunt Sally's fire, which was built in the street, he saw the object of his solicitude some distance below, engaged in a similar task. Upon one pretense or

another, he managed to keep watch of her till they had eaten supper, when he was at once hurried away and fastened up for the night.

Of course he was shut off from all further observation ; but even Simple Phil had learned much that would be of use to him in time. He had seen Esther enter a lodge several times in the course of her culinary operations, and this, he had little doubt, was the one in which she would pass the night.

Already his resolve was taken—he would see her before morning light, if such a thing were possible, and learn how she came there, how she was used, and endeavor to concoct some scheme for mutual escape. How this was to be done did not yet appear plain to the schemer ; but he had heard many stories of the whites having outwitted savages in similar instances, and he fancied it would not be so very difficult, after all.

If he could but get out of his prison. That was the first and most important consideration ; all that was to follow seemed quite easy, if he could once get out of that awkward cone.

Waiting till Aunt Sally was asleep, he begun his investigations. To attempt the door proper, he knew, would be utterly useless. He had seen that fastened too securely for any efforts of his to open, without making such a noise as to waken the whole Indian town. Besides, he knew not but that a zealous guard might at that moment be stationed without, to keep watch over their sleeping hours.

In view of these circumstances he must seek some covert way of escape, and some plan which could be carried out without noise. Rather desperate seemed the chance, as he looked about the strongly-built prison. He had already examined it sufficiently to know that there was but one possibility of egress, and that was from the opening at the apex. Toward this, then, he turned his thoughts.

As stated, this opening was some sixteen feet from the ground, and the adventurer had no possible mode of reaching it, save by climbing the sloping poles themselves. To cling to the under side of them, and make any upward progress, was a feat worthy a gymnast. But, Phil had carefully surveyed the ground before darkness closed in, and he had

partially satisfied himself that the thing could be done. Two of the poles gave a greater chance for a grasp than any of the others, and upon these the effort was to be made.

He waited with patience for some time, for he not only wanted Aunt Sally to be sound asleep, but would prefer to have the Indians in a like state. Finally it seemed to him that every thing must be ready, and he nerved himself for the undertaking.

Spitting upon his hands, the would-be scout began to climb. He soon found it to be no easy task. His fingers ached and slipped, and his arms seemed pulling from their sockets. By the most desperate energy he had reached half the distance to the summit, when, by an unlucky grasp, he lost his hold, and came to the ground.

"Plague on it! that was too bad!" he exclaimed, rubbing his bleeding fingers, and preparing for another trial. "But I'll know about that place next time, so I won't tumble off there again."

He paused for a moment, seeming to consider if some plan might not be adopted which would assist him; but apparently satisfied that the thing must be done by manual dexterity, he grasped the pole once more, and began to clamber upward.

The second attempt was more successful than the first had been. After a severe struggle he passed the point whence he had slipped before, and finding a position where his feet could assist in supporting him, he paused to gain breath.

Four or five feet still remained to climb, and these were the more difficult, owing to the decreasing size of the poles. The roofing, too, was fastened more compactly as he neared the top, so that it was frequently a serious task to find room for his fingers. But these difficulties only served to whet his determination, as he approached the realization of his hopes.

Hand over hand he went, each effort bringing him six inches nearer the orifice, which appeared quite large enough to admit of his exit. At length he gained it. Utterly exhausted, he had just strength enough to grasp the band of withes surrounding the opening. For a moment he thought of the unpleasant consequences should it refuse to bear his

weight; but, though there was a crackling, it proved firm, and he was upon the outside a moment later.

An unqualified thrill of joy passed over his frame as this consummation was gained. He did not pause to reflect that any number of enemies might observe his movements against the star-lit sky, and render all his hopes abortive. But fortune favored the young man. None of the few savages who were abroad at the time saw his exalted position, and he slipped down the roof to the ground unobserved.

Gliding along a few steps, and then stopping to listen, he made his way toward the building which he had reason to suppose was occupied by Esther. He did not ask himself how he should proceed upon reaching it, or what would be his most proper course should he encounter any stray savage. He had cast his fortune upon chance, and was quite satisfied that fate should arrange the minor details of his adventure.

Not till he reached the walls of the lodge in question, which was of similar construction to the one he himself occupied, did he begin to think what would be proper, or how he was to secure the desired knowledge in regard to her presence.

He looked at the lodge, and even walked partially around it, as though the dark walls would unfold to him the plan to be pursued.

"I wish I knew whether she's in thar'," he mused, mentally. "I don't want to look for a bird and stir up a rattlesnake, or catch a wolf instead of a sheep. I must play smart on 'em somehow; how in the world am I goin' about it?"

This was a question of vital importance, and one he was not likely to settle in a hurry. While he stood behind the sheltering lodge and wondered, he saw an Indian leave the vicinity of the chief's lodge, and hasten that way. The stars enabled him to mark the fellow's movements, and he saw that he was coming directly toward the lodge which he himself was watching.

"Likely 'nuff I'll find out something from that feller," he mused. "I'll keep an eye on his movements, and see if I can't."

But the savage paused before reaching the place, turned upon his heel, and entered another cabin. Presently he

reappeared, carrying in his hand a pine-knot, which he proceeded to light at the remains of the fire which still smoldered in the street. This done he strode onward, and soon the glare of his torch appeared within the lodge.

A feeling of uneasiness possessed Phil, at these singular movements. What could be the Indian's intention? Surely nothing good in its nature could bring him there at that time and in such a stealthy manner.

Hastening to the aperture through which the light shone, Phil glanced in, and beheld enough to fill him with such emotion as never before possessed his soul. For some time he continued to gaze, and as he gazed his face became livid, and his breath was drawn through tightly shut teeth.

CHAPTER XII.

BOLD STROKES.

THE building was very similar in construction to that in which Phil and Aunt Sally had been quartered, and its purpose seemed to have been similar, to contain the savages' corn during the winter season. In fact, the two lodges had been built by the would-be civilized chief, Rolling Waters, in imitation of some of the settlers' granaries which had come under his observation.

At the moment when Phil applied his eye to the opening, the Indian had planted one end of his torch in the ground, and was securing the entrance behind him. The lodge was destitute of grain, save a small pile of husks in one corner, which evidently had been designed for a bed. Beside it, pale and frightened, stood Esther Morgan. Her gaze was fixed upon the Indian's movements, and the deliberation which attended them seemed to fill her with mortal terror. One quick, imploring look Phil saw her cast around, as if in search of some way of escape, and then she turned to meet her dusky visitant.

The Indian advanced till he stood in front of Esther, and

then folded his arms across his breast. For nearly a minute he remained gazing in silence upon her, and it was plainly to be seen that his emotions were not of a pleasing character. Then he burst forth, in the broken manner of his people:

"Me heart heavy. Me feel much bad. Me go to see Nem-di-man-do, and him no good chief. Him wronged me—him use me very bad."

The speaker paused, to note the effect of his words upon the listener. Her countenance had not changed sensibly, and the dusky complainer proceeded:

"Me hunt in woods, and bring in fair white flower. Me love it, and want to plant in my wigwam. But great chief see flower, too, and take it away—set it in him corn-field—him no right—ugh!"

"Then why not open the door, and let me go to my people?" demanded Esther, as he finished speaking. "That will make you and your chief quits, and me happy."

There was a momentary pause, and the listener without pressed closer, that he might not lose a word. A faint flush of hope seemed to light up the maiden's cheek, as she awaited the answer which was to come.

"No, no; me not do that," returned the Indian, after a short time spent in meditation. "Me do better. Chief no let me take pale flower to my wigwam, but me come here and see her. Nem-di-man-do think pale-face stay here alone, but me know better. Me come and stay with her. Better for me—other squaws no have much talk!"

"Indeed, you'll do nothing of the kind," returned the maiden, speaking firmly, although she trembled at the danger in which she so unexpectedly found herself. "If you don't go away at once I shall cry out and bring down your chief. He will punish you severely."

The Indian regarded her a moment in silence, as if to satisfy himself to what extent she might intend fulfilling her threat; then, drawing his hatchet, he returned:

"You make noise and me cut off head!"

"Then so it shall be," was the undaunted reply. "Better death than a fate infinitely worse. Leave me, or I shall call for your chief."

She took a step forward, and the Indian moved back a pace, each regarding the other steadily.

But what of the watcher without?

His heart had been fired with indignation at beholding the insolent manner of the Sioux, and he longed to mete out to him the punishment his temerity merited. But, he reflected that there was no opportunity for reaching the red-man, who was armed, and might soon rid himself of his unpleasant visitor.

No sooner, however, did the base schemer begin to unfold a dark design, than the heart of Phil leaped with rage. He felt himself able, at that moment, to tear the vile savage limb from limb!

His fury amounted to frenzy when the crisis was reached, and the red-man begun to threaten his intended victim. The brandished hatchet was no longer a source of dread to the enraged lover; he only sought some means by which to get within striking distance of the detested aborigine. His mind, naturally rather slow, flew with the quickness of thought. He could not enter by the natural passage before it might be forever too late, if the Indian should dare carry out his murderous threat. But, there was the opening at the top; he had gained egress from his own prison by means of it, why could he not make it serve his present purpose? With a cat-like motion he sprung up the sloping roof, and almost before he was conscious of it himself, had gained the opening.

Again his eye took in the aspect of affairs at a glance. The savage was standing directly beneath him, his hatchet by his side, talking earnestly, pleadingly with the maiden. Phil did not stop to hear his words. He comprehended his advantage, and dropped through the opening without a pause.

The unsuspecting savage was scarcely prepared for the fall of nearly a hundred and fifty pounds, avoirdupois upon his shoulders, from such a height. The hatchet flew from his hand, the breath from his body, and he fell into a stunned pile.

Of course the shock was far from gentle to Phil, but he was prepared for it, and no sooner did he alight than he sprung for the hatchet, which was near by. He was not a moment too soon. Severely as the savage was injured, he

had no idea of giving up the contest, especially after he realized the character of his assailant. He begun to give a gasp, his nearest possible approach to a yell, and rise to his feet, when Phil brought down the hatchet with a force which put a *quietus* to all his movements for the present.

But, lest a single blow should prove insufficient, the ardent youth followed it up with two or three more, gritting his teeth together to give him the needed courage. Satisfied that nothing more was to be feared from that quarter, he turned toward Esther, who was standing in the remotest corner of the lodge, uncertain whether to credit her senses.

"Is it possible that it's you, Phil?" she asked, advancing with both hands extended. "Oh, how can I thank you enough? I did not think the great God would utterly desert me!"

"No, he didn't, Esther. I've been watchin' ye cut corn this afternoon, and couldn't put away the idee of comin' to see you to-night. So I slipped away, and come over, but this feller was a little ahead on me!"

"You've saved my life, if nothing more," she said. "Oh, you never can know the fear I was in after he entered this place. He stole me from my companions, and brought me up here, expecting to make me his wife, or something less creditable; but the chief forbid him, and set me to work in his corn-field."

"Then Austin and his gal air—all right?"

"I think they are safe at home before this time."

"By gracious Peter! Well, I'm glad of that. I wish we was with 'em."

"Can't we go?"

"I guess we'll hev' tew. Here, I've been and smashed that Injin's head up tew much for comfort. Only bother is—can we git away?"

"We *must* go, Phil; it'll be death for us to stay here till this thing is known around! The first Indian that finds us will think it is his duty to kill us, without any hesitation. There's nothing we can do but get away just as soon as possible!"

"Perhaps I'd better been a leetle keerful with the feller," returned Phil, walking to the body, and making sure that life had really departed. "Maybe if I'd ha' let him off with a good drubbin'—"

"No, that wouldn't have helped the matter any," returned the maiden. "There's no help for what is done; it will be well enough if we can get away before it's found out."

The maiden moved toward the doorway as she spoke, but Phil detained her.

"Just hold on while I fix this nasty skunk," he said, "so they won't be quite so apt to diskiver what's the matter of him. 'Twon't take me but a minit, and then we'll be goin'."

He grasped the body, and was upon the point of dragging it from the place where it lay, when another idea seemed to enter his head.

"By George! These things may come handy for me," he said, bending over and unbuckling the belt which encircled the Indian's body. "I'll jest take them along, tew remember the feller what made love to my *gal*!"

He buckled it about his own waist, and then replaced the hatchet beside the knife. Making sure that there was nothing else about the body which could be of use to him, he drew the carcass down beside the pile of husks which had been intended as a couch for Esther. These he removed, placing them over the body so carefully that no one, unacquainted with the bloody secret, would have imagined a dead body to be concealed there.

This unpleasant task performed, he rejoined the maiden.

"We had better put out the torch," she observed. "It might betray us."

The blazing knot was speedily extinguished, and then they groped for the door. It was readily found, and with a little difficulty the Indian's fastening removed. Phil lifted aside the heavy timber, and the way toward freedom was open before them.

For a moment he listened, to assure himself that no moving foes were in the vicinity. Satisfied upon this point, he stepped forth, and Esther followed immediately. All was still, unusually so, about the Indian town. Uncertain whether to consider this a fortunate omen, or otherwise, Phil replaced the pole which served as a door, and made it as secure as possible, without creating a disturbance.

Then grasping the hand of his companion he led her around to the rear of the lodge, whence they picked their

way, by the most unfrequented routes, toward the lodge where he had left Aunt Sally securely sleeping.

Without any adventure they reached the rear of the building, and leaving his companion in its deepest shadow, Phil moved away, to find some means of liberating the venerable lady. As previously stated, the pole which closed the entrance fitted to a rude socket, and was secured by a large wooden pin, which was driven in and out with stones, hatchets, or any thing which came to hand.

As there was no possible way to remove Aunt Sally but by this opening, he crept around, and begun cautiously to work upon the fastening. His first efforts, to draw it forth by a steady pull, using his recently acquired hatchet for that purpose, were utterly futile. He might as well have attempted to overturn the lodge.

"Confound the thing," he muttered, "it's got to be driv' out! I s'pect I'll make such a racket that I'll scare up all the red-skins afore I git through. Let me see; how be I goin' to dew this, and not make a racket?"

He reflected for a short time, then doubled his coat-skirt, and placing it about the shoulder of the pin, applied his hatchet, with cautious blows. But though the sound was deadened, it was still likely to attract attention. He paused in dismay.

"Perhaps a stone would do better," some hidden monitor seemed to say, and Phil tried a stone.

The effect was more satisfactory. The pin soon yielded, and dropping it beside him, the operator rose to his feet. He was almost startled at seeing Esther glide around from the rear of the lodge.

"There's an Indian coming around that way," she said, "and I was afraid to stay. Perhaps he will go by, and —"

"In here with you," said Phil, opening the way and pushing her within the Indian granary. "We'll give him a chance to mind his own business."

As the maiden disappeared, Phil sprung in after her, carefully closing the door behind him. Then he stopped beside the crevices to listen. The steps of a stealthy brave were soon heard, approaching the lodge. But instead of passing by they stopped at the entrance.

"Here, quick!" exclaimed the young man, grasping Esther's hand, and leading her toward a corner where a natural recess had been made by the disposition of the corn. "Crawl in here, and keep quiet. I guess the feller's coming in!"

She had scarcely time to heed the request, when the door was opened, and immediately darkened by the form of an Indian. It must be confessed that Phil's heart stood still, but he carefully covered the tomahawk and knife, and assumed the position of one in a sound sleep. But he was also careful to keep his eye fixed upon the movements of the intruder.

The latter paused at the door, and, bending low, endeavored to scan the interior of the lodge. In this even his keen eyes were unsuccessful, and he carefully advanced, feeling about for the occupants. He soon found Aunt Sally, and uttered a grunt of satisfaction.

"She all right," Phil heard him mutter. "Now me find the *fool*!"

The subject of this uncomplimentary epithet ground his teeth together, and clinched the handle of his hatchet more firmly.

"*Fool*, am I?" he thought. "Well, we'll see what you think about it in the mornin'. Maybe, if ye ain't purty keerful, a fool'll put ye under these corn-stalks!"

The Indian came, feeling his way along, until his hand rested upon Phil's body. Satisfied that the young man was really there, he raised up with a grunt of relief, and started toward the entrance again. In a moment he was without, and had fastened the opening securely behind him. This done, he sauntered off, apparently satisfied that all was right.

Before he had left the hut a half-dozen paces behind, the slightest rustling might have been heard in the corn there stored, and a shadowy form crept up to the opening. Phil Wimbles stood and watched the intruder away from the vicinity, and then he began the work of liberating himself and companions.

By reaching his arm through the opening at one side, and grasping his hatchet by the end of the handle, he was

enabled to touch the pin which held the pole in position. He did not like the idea of chopping it off, when such fatal consequences might attend discovery; but there was no other way. With a beating heart he commenced hacking away. The first few blows sounded fearfully loud, but he persevered, and perseverance brought success. The pin was soon so nearly severed that a vigorous push broke it away, and the route was open before them.

When Phil turned to seek his companions, he found them both standing close behind him. Aunt Sally was rubbing her eyes, but felt too delighted at the prospect of freedom to grumble much. Only she inquired:

"Why in the world, Phil, didn't you let me know what ye was up to afore this time?"

To which Phil meekly replied, that she could have been of no assistance to him, and he preferred that she should sleep till the moment came.

"Wal, Phil," was the consoling response, "ye allus was a kind-hearted lad. 'Tis a great pity nater didn't dew for ye as she done for other boys!"

"Never mind. Come on and don't waste time in tellin' old stories now."

The trio crept carefully from the hut, and Phil readjusted the pole at the opening as well as he was able. Then they glided away in the darkness, and very soon left the Indian town behind them.

All through the balance of the night did they travel, and when the morning broke it revealed three haggard, weary, ragged beings, wandering, they knew not where. But with the sun's first rays Phil was enabled to shape their course more correctly—and still they pressed on.

Pausing only when tired nature was forced to rest, they continued the weary journey till afternoon shades began to prevail. Then their hearts were made glad by the appearance of white men in the distance. They proved to be Austin Morgan, with friends, come to attempt the rescue of his sister and her fellow-captives.

The meeting which ensued we could not adequately describe, even if space permitted. After partaking of refreshments—in the shape of solid food and cold water—the party

turned their faces toward Pineville, where they arrived in due course of time, without any further adventures.

Desolate it seemed, with many of the buildings laid in ashes, and a pall of mourning over many a family. But in the midst of the general sorrow which prevailed, the arrival of our little band of adventurers created a pleasure. They had been regarded as lost, and the strange story which they had to tell of their captivity and providential escape inspired not a little awe and wonder.

The fact that they had really been prisoners in the village of the cruel chief Rolling Waters, was sufficient to awaken the most intense wonder.

Melinda Sawyer, pale, weak, and worn, threw her arms about the neck of her lover, and clung to him with the fondness of true hearts reunited. For the sake of his sister and friends she had allowed him to depart, though scarcely expecting to behold him again.

Esther was strong and hopeful, and though confined to the house for several days, her frame resisted the attacks of disease, and she was soon the same cheerful, healthful maiden as of yore.

Not so with poor Aunt Sally. The fatigues and terrors to which she had been subjected, added to her advanced age, proved too severe for her. Fever seized her, and although friends ministered at her couch with all kind offices, and Phil sought with the most devoted tenderness to prolong her stay upon earth, she closed her eyes in that blissful sleep which knows no sorrow, no woe. With her latest breath she bade Phil a fond good-by, and blessed him that her bones could be laid to rest in the midst of their pleasant little homestead. A grave was prepared beneath a wide-spreading tree, and there careful hands placed her earthly remains.

Squire Hutchins recovered from his wounds, and soon a new barn replaced that which had been destroyed. In the springtime a pleasant assemblage gathered at his house, and occupied the day in planting. But in the evening a festive scene was opened in "the hall." Parson Willard, still suffering from the dreadful wounds he had received on that night of terror, was present, and a double marriage opened the sociality. Austin Morgan took the blushing Melinda Sawyer

to his heart and home for life, and Phil Wimbles, whom people no longer looked upon as a *simpleton*, but who had proved himself, when the occasion arose to demand of him a full exercise of his dormant faculties, to be equal to the emergency, performed a like part to Esther.

In the happiness which followed, we leave them, one and all.

THE END.

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Dat's wat's de matter,	All about a bee,	Latest Chinese outrage,	My neighbor's dogs,
The Mississippi miracle,	Scandal,	The manifest destiny of	Condensed Mythology,
Ven te tide coons in,	A dark side view,	the Irishman,	Pictus,
Dose tins vot Mary ha'	Te pesser vay,	Peggy McCann,	The Nereides,
got,	On learning German,	Sprays from Josh Bill	Legends of Africa,
Pat O'Flaherty on wo	Mary's shinnall vite lamb	ings,	The stove-pipe tragedy
man's rights,	A healthy discourse,	De circumstances ob de	A doketor's drubbles,
The home rulers, how	Co ins a to speak,	situation,	The coming man,
they "spake,"	Did Mrs. Grimes,	Dar's nuffin new under	The Hiliant affair at
Hezeki'ah Dawson or	parody,	de sun,	Muldeon's,
Mothers in-law,	Mrs and cats,	A Negro religious poem,	That little Laby round
He didn't sell the farm	Bill Underwood, pilot,	That violin,	the corner,
The true story of Frank	Old Granley,	Picnic delights,	A genuwine inference,
lin's kite,	The pill peddler's ora-	Our candidate's views,	An invitation to the
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